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The dream of Chinese reality television ideological fantasy and contradiction in post-Mao China

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The Dream of Chinese Reality Television

**Ideological Fantasy and Contradiction in post-Mao
China**

A Dissertation Presented

CHENG HAN

Submitted to Coventry University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the development of Western-originated reality television (RTV) within a socialist country which is adopting and adapting a capitalist economic system. By doing so, I intend to contribute to the limited amount of academic literature on Chinese RTV (CRTV) both in China and the Western world. The study looks at CRTV from the point of view of the government's regulations, public's reactions to the programmes, and interviews with television viewers. It also analyses the programmes themselves. Areas focused upon within the study were the programmes regulated by the State Administration of Radio, Film and TV, such as game shows, talent shows and dating shows, and a social experiment show praised by the public and the government, *The Exchange Programme*.

The contradiction and struggle between the market and socialist ideology was explored through the study of CRTV. CRTV becomes a site demonstrating that the market threatens the state's sovereignty, and reveals the social and moral crisis induced by the market. The originality of this study is to observe how the market is both legitimised and resisted by the government and socialist ideology in post-Mao China. For Slavoj Žižek, the market is 'a For-itself of ideology at work in the very In-itself of extra-ideological actuality' (1994a:14). This notion of the market prompts me to ask if the socialist ideology is an ideology in-and-for itself as well. Therefore, I analyse how the socialist ideology operates in CRTV through the hegemonic struggle, the common-sense assertion at the level of consciousness, and also retroactively trace what had been overlooked unconscious fantasy. My research can be seen as a test conducted to validate Žižek's work in the Chinese context. The revealed countryside fantasy as a resisting force, continues the struggle between socialism and neoliberalism at the level of the unconscious.

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Conducting this research in England is not only a course of improving my academic skills, but also a personal spiritual journey. It is for me to live western culture and theories, to find the inner passion and strength, to become wiser and get closer to the truth of life. Throughout the whole journey of this research, I am indebted to many people for their encouragement and forbearance.

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The DVD:

The DVD includes several episodes of *TEP* in different seasons and an advertising clip of *Survival Challenge*. I have used these materials when I conduct textual analysis in the dissertation.

Introduction

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- Opening sequence of *The Exchange Programme* (2012,2014)

This thesis aims to examine the development of Western-originated Reality Television (RTV) within a non-Western context, more specifically, within a socialist nation which is adopting and adapting to a capitalist economic system. My research offers a possible different outlook on the politics and cultural dynamics of RTV in the context of Chinese society. In doing so, I intend to contribute to the limited amount of academic literature on Chinese RTV (CRTV), both in China and the Western world. The study looks at the media through governmental regulations, the public's reactions to these programmes, interviews with television viewers and the examination of the programmes themselves. Areas focused upon within the study were the programmes regulated by the State Administration of Radio, Film and TV (SARFT), such as game shows, talent shows and dating shows, and a social experiment show praised by the public and the government, *The Exchange Programme* (TEP).

I argue that the contradictions and struggles that exist between market and socialist ideology can be explored through the study of CRTV and the study of how socialist ideology operates in CRTV at both a conscious and an unconscious level in the Chinese context. The findings and discussions within this research reveal the discomfort of the government, social and moral crisis, hegemonic struggle and the socialist 'ideological fantasy' (Slavoj Zizek 1989). At present, it is rare to find research of RTV that applies Zizek's theories. My research can be seen as a test conducted to validate Zizek's work in the Chinese context by revealing an ideological fantasy in a socialist state. This socialist ideological fantasy is a resisting force, which does not surrender to the capitalist market. It is the operation of the market, i.e. the core of neoliberalism, as an 'ideology in-and-for itself' (Zizek 1994a), in a socialist state which serves as a particular context for the entire thesis.

It needs to be noted that Zizek's theory has a strong connection with the theoretical work of Lacan, Marx and Hegel. He uses both Marxism and psychoanalysis to develop his theories concerning ideology, ideological fantasy, and the subject. By expanding the traditional definition of 'ideology', Zizek argues against the discourse of post-ideology. Adopting a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, he re-interprets Marx's analysis of 'commodity fetishism', identifying an overlooked, unconscious illusion, with the intention of

explaining the cynicism pervasive in a capitalist society dominated by the market. Additionally, for Žižek, it is the 'Ideological fantasy' that constructs both social reality and the subject. Žižek's theory is particularly relevant here because his concepts of fantasy, ideology and subjectivity, along with his use of Lacan's ideas about the real, the imaginary and the symbolic as well as the attendant structures produced through that formulation, allow for a detailed exploration of the nature of capitalism's contradictions, and the fantasy and the signifiers that fill them.

RTV in the Chinese Context

RTV is a new hybridised genre, evolved from a cross-fertilisation of genres, such as observational documentary, soap opera, game show, talk show, and sports programmes, composed of a wide range of themes. It aims to have good performance in the television market. RTV is produced as television media's response to the doctrine of the market. The audience's participation in the rationalisation of their own consumption is disguised as 'customisation' and sold as 'empowerment' (Mark Andrejevic 2004). As Annette Hill says, 'the rise of reality TV came at a time when networks were looking for a quick fix solution to economic problems within the cultural industries' (2005:41). Therefore, the question lies in what implications does the transplantation of Western RTV carry for the Chinese television market?

RTV promises high ratings, with relatively low production costs and is easily localised by encouraging and exploiting the participation of local audiences. Since 2000, the global franchise of RTV formats such as *Survivor*, *Pop Idol*, *The Apprentice*, *Take Me Out* has had a crucial impact on the Chinese television market. For example, the first Chinese version of *Survivor*, *Survival Challenge*, produced by Guangdong TV in 2000, its success marked the first wave of RTV in the Chinese television market. The second wave was based on the enormous success of *Super Girl* in 2005, the Chinese version of *Pop Idol*, produced by Hunan TV. Some lifestyle, makeover and social experiment RTV formats have also been transplanted since then, such as *The Apprentice*, *Changing Rooms*, and *Switch Switch*. The current third wave began with *If You are the One*, the Chinese version of *Take Me Out*, produced by Jiangsu TV in 2010.

Most importantly, the specialty of RTV in the Chinese context lies in the fact that its move from West to East started right at the time when the central government started the cultural market reform to develop socialist cultural industries in 2000. Chinese radio and television, as important components of cultural industries, were asked to take the path of marketisation. RTV, due to its extraordinary performance in television market, was transplanted with the expectation to open a new nationwide television market. Succinctly, CRTV market, in itself, is part of the globalisation of RTV market. The development of CRTV is a market operation of television media in the first place. However, globalisation, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998a, 2003) argued, represents the core of neoliberalism, which, as a market ideology, an economic doctrine, seeks to limit the scope and activity of government and aims to develop free trade. In other words, the neoliberal market threatens the state's sovereignty. Therefore, the contradictions and struggle between the

market and the state's sovereignty is established as the first step to discover the development of CRTV. The struggle and the discomfort of the government can be observed through the intervention of the state's media administrative institution, i.e. SARFT, in the CRTV market. Putting it directly, the regulation conducted by SARFT should be understood as reaffirming the state's sovereignty in the first place. Yet, in an unusual way, the regulation simultaneously maintains the legitimacy of the neoliberal market in a socialist state.

Additionally, a range of Western research has argued that RTV such as game shows, lifestyle and makeover programmes demonstrate or express neoliberal ideas, such as individually-motivated competition, self-responsibility, etc. The media, as Zizek says, 'structures our perception of reality in advance and renders reality indistinguishable from the 'aestheticized' image of it' (1994a:14). Thus, Nick Couldry (2008) correctly states that RTV, such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, simulates the competitive situations in the modern market and functions as a theatre for the performance of neoliberalism, in order for people to accept the values presented. RTV therefore contributes to the formation of 'cynicism' (Zizek 1989) and 'capitalist realism' (Mark Fisher 2009). However, this neoliberal individual-, competition- centred idea conflicts with socialist ideology which is collective-oriented and emphasises egalitarianism. It is precisely the situation of post-Mao China----a socialist state is adopting and adapting the neoliberal market economy.

The above is the initial state of transplanting RTV in the Chinese context, which is also the starting point for this study. I argue, the ideological contradiction, often camouflaged or spoken little about in China as a sensitive issue, is brought to light through the opening of CRTV market. And this is seen in the representations presented in the subgenres that includes *Survivor* and *Big Brother* started in 2000. More detailed discussion about how the central government responds to the RTV transplant will be carried out in Chapter 3.

China's market-oriented Open Reform started in December 1978. The introduction of the neoliberal market has impacted on every nook and cranny of people's daily lives. For more than three decades, the neoliberal market economy in China has been generating vast profits for the state and huge accumulations of wealth for the new super-rich, while grossly increasing the gap between rich and poor and deepening inequalities of income, health, education and life chances in this society. For example, the urban-rural divide is one of the consequences of promoting market-driven urbanisation. The economic disparity happens amongst the urban group as well. It results in the formulation of different social strata, such as the super-rich, the functionary, the manager, the entrepreneurs, the unemployed workers, etc. This is where the social antagonisms, rifts, and unrest arise.

Against this backcloth, my next observation will be that the subgenres, such as the talent show and dating show, reveal the social and moral crisis induced by the neoliberal market. For example: the deepening economic stratification, the conflict between rich and poor, the social anxiety and trauma. The Chinese people have been compelled to digest stark social division and unrest as the market's obverse, negative consequence. I argue, the

social issues once concealed by the myth of 'development and transition' are brought out to the surface by these programmes. Therefore, it is not surprising to see SARFT intervening in CCTV market and its representations again. A detailed discussion will be carried out in Chapter 4. The tough task for the central government at this moment is to accommodate these two contradictory ideologies. It tries to maintain the breakneck rates of economic growth, the stability of state power and political authority, as well as socialist values as its political legacy and legality.

Further, nowadays, the market has become the model of social relations, exchange value being the only value. The market forces have pressed deeply into people's private lives, as well as dominating political discourse. According to Žižek, the market is 'a For-itself of ideology at work in the very In-itself of extra-ideological actuality' (1994a:14), which not only challenges the socialist concept of redistribution, egalitarianism, collective provision, but also functions at the level of 'doing', rather than 'knowing'. So, to what extent, is socialist ideology able to resist the market, and veto the idea that 'China is today the ideal capital state' (Žižek 2002:146-47)? This is where the significance of analysing *TEP* can be seen. *TEP*, a social experiment programme, is produced by Hunan TV. It takes as its backcloth the urban-rural divide in Post-Mao China, juxtaposes urban and rural youth by arranging for them to experience the life of their counterpart for seven days. It was once praised as a new style documentary, as it applies the documentary making skill and records youth participants' activities for 24 hours and 7 days during their stay in their counterpart's home. It was aired from 4th September 2006 to 29th April 2008, through season one to season four. After a three-year interval, it re-started with season five on 4th January 2012, season six and seven in 2013, season eight in 2014.

In the Chinese television market, Hunan TV has been taking the leading role in producing entertainment programmes and CCTV. However, its products, the talent show *Super Girl* (2005) and the dating show *Let's Go on a Date* (2010), were both accused of overly focusing on ratings and overlooking the media's social responsibility. Both of these two programmes were regulated by SARFT, respectively in the period of 2006 to 2007 and in October 2011. The unusual fact about *TEP* is that it was launched twice in the two periods of regulation to highlight media responsibility. *TEP* started in 2006 and received approval from the official institutions, such as Ministry of Public Security, the Publicity Department of the Central Committee, the Publicity Department of the Hunan Provincial Committee, Hunan Communist Youth League committee, etc. (Chen Yao 2008:21-2). After a nearly three-year interval, it restarted with season five in 2012 and has been broadcast right up until now. The ratings of season five has reached 1.2%, occupied No.1 in its time segment nationwide. During an interview (Changsha, February 2012), editor Ma Xiaohan and Cai Yao both confirmed that Hunan TV relaunched *TEP* due to the new regulation of SARFT.¹

¹ *Further Management on Satellite Television Channels and its Programmes:*

a) From 1st January 2012 onwards, each satellite TV shall broadcast news programmes no less than 2 hours between 6:00 till 24:00 each day; must produce more than two news programmes between 18:00 to 23:30, with each programme no less than 30 minutes; must produce one moral standards education programme which advocates the Chinese traditional virtue and socialist core values.

In the *Re-Visiting* episode of season five on 28th March 2012, interviewed by the editor, Wang Xiaohong, associate dean of the Television and News School, Communication University of China, comments, 'I like this programme very much, from lots of different perspectives, it represents media responsibility.' Cheng Manli, associate dean of the News and Communication School, Beijing University, believes, 'it is a good model we could use for student education, including family education, school education and other deeper levels.' So, the questions are what actually are the 'deeper levels' of education on display here? What kind of 'media responsibility' exactly is at work? These questions make *TEP* a very interesting and important case to look at in Chapter 4, and is exclusively analysed in Chapter 5 and 6. The originality of my analysis of *TEP* is to reveal the existence of a countryside fantasy and the universal hybridity. *TEP* represents, reveals and intervenes in the urban-rural divide induced by the neoliberal market-driven urbanisation.

The above walks through and explains the structure of the main body of the thesis. Based on this thinking, I pose the following questions categorised in three groups. In the pages that follow, I will consider and engage with these questions which also serve to provide a framework for the discussions in each Chapter.

Research Questions

a) During the transplanting of western RTV, the forces of marketisation challenge the previous dominance of the state's ideological control. Therefore, how do regulatory acts of SARFT reflect the concern of the centralist government? How does it do this with regard to this so-called Western genre which embodies what are seen as the 'Western negative values'(Chapter 3)? What discomfort does the central government confront in post-Mao China? What does CRTV, such as game shows, talent shows, and dating shows, reveal in regard to social crisis?

b) How are the social and moral crisis condensed onto women and their alleged 'money worshipping' discourse? How does the regulation of SARFT aim at regulating the market by shaping the common-sense assertion, 'money can't buy you happiness'? How does this move unexpectedly contribute to the formation of cynicism? How does *TEP* insist on the inevitability and rationality of the market-driven urbanisation, whilst the urban-rural divide is part of it, and therefore, contribute to the cynicism as well?

c) How does *TEP* present a perfect urban youth as a representative of the Chinese city? How does *TEP* ideologically solve the contradiction between the market and socialism? What ideological fantasy is revealed? How does *TEP* represent rural youth, including the ethnic minority represented by the rural youth? What form does common sense

b) Limits the broadcast of dating show, talent show, life story show, game show, talk show, etc. From 19:30 till 22:00, only no more than nine of these programmes can be on air nationwide. Each satellite TV should not broadcast more than two of these programmes in a week. The length of broadcast these programmes, from 19:30 till 22:00, should not exceed 90 minutes.

c) Shall not practice the ratings ranking, shall not eliminate a programme purely based on its ratings.

formulated amongst both urban and rural audiences take? How does the ideological fantasy appear as common-sense assertions, capture people's jouissance, and constitute our desire? How do we identify with what symptom?

RTV Research in China

Most of Western research has been inevitably steered towards more popular programmes in the Western context, such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, lifestyle and makeover programmes, and mainly focus on three aspects: representation, revelation and intervention (Chapter 2). However, RTV research in China has gone in a different direction. As Graeme Turner writes, 'the audience appeal of Western popular culture has always been regarded as a serious challenge to the local culture within nation-states that wish to maintain a distinction between their values and those of the West---for political, cultural, religious or other reasons' (2010:54). Indeed, importing Western programmes is often regarded as a potential threat to the Chinese culture; therefore, localisation is heavily stressed with the intention of bringing RTV in line with the Chinese context. Also, CRTV is subjected to the management and regulation of SARFT, censored or even banned if deemed to be a threat to the nation's political, ideological, cultural, and moral values. Due to the requirement of localisation, Chinese scholars have mainly focused on RTV's production, the participation of ordinary people and its performance. For example, the only two monographs that I have found both place their main attention on RTVs production and localisation. One was published in 2006, *Entertainment Whirlwind: Knowing Reality Television*, by Yin Hong, Ran Ruxue, and Lu Hong. In this book, they summarise the production skills and put programmes into different catalogues, such as survival challenge, special experience, techniques contest, etc. In 2007, Xie Gengyun and Chen Hong published *Reality Television: Theory, Format and Innovation*, and talk about its characteristics, evolution, narrative strategies, and format innovation. However, I have found no Chinese studies of CRTV, in China and the West, that uses the theoretical work represented by cultural studies, particularly theoretical work concerning ideology as represented by the work of Stuart Hall and Slavoj Zizek.

The Western way of looking at RTV simply cannot be transferred to analyse CRTV, because the context is different. Succinctly, the West is capitalist through and through within the context of social democracy. China, in its post-Mao era, is a socialist state but is introducing the neoliberal market, which is the latest form of capitalism, with the ideological baggage that involves. Though the doctrine of the market is dominating the society, China is still committed at some level to be a socialist state. The contradiction between neoliberal and socialist ideology is experienced as an inevitable and daunting challenge. Given that, the ideological formation of Western texts is different to that of Chinese ones, some of the Western work on RTV is even at risk of the possible collusion with neoliberalism (see Chapter 2). Therefore, though I am aware the work that has been done, but I am taking a particular route through it, in regard to methodology and theoretical frame.

Methodology

The approach used in this study is in line with the practice of cultural studies in an attempt to explore and understand the ideological operation of CRTV. Therefore, it is important to conduct textual analysis and discourse analysis, to analyse representations, controversies, the negotiated consensus and common-sense assertions at the level of consciousness, and to trace the ideological fantasy at the level of the unconscious.

In order to examine 'how certain ideas are legitimised and 'made real' through their media representations' (Lisa Taylor and Andrew Willis 1999:31) and latent meanings in media texts, close and critical textual analysis is inevitable. Representation is ideological; it plays a central role in securing and maintaining the ideological consent of audiences. And representation could change and finally reflect a negotiated consensus, as Stuart Hall argued, 'the media can only survive legitimately by operating within the consensus' (1982:87). Also, in order to shape the consensus, the hegemonic struggle and the process of negotiation are inevitable. This is where discourse analysis is useful and important.

For Antonio Gramsci, ideology is a site of particularly vigorous contestation, and popular culture is a source of considerable resistance within the hegemonic formation. He understood the relevant role of ideology and the state, and offered a more comprehensive insight into popular culture and ideological struggle through concepts such as hegemony and common sense. Hegemony, as Gramsci said, is not given to the continuing rule of a particular class. It has to be won, reproduced and sustained. The particular social group struggle in many different ways, including ideologically, winning the consent of other groups and achieving a kind of ascendancy in both thought and practice over them. Hall also explained the diversification of social struggles in the light of Gramsci, 'in modern societies, hegemony must be constructed, contested and won on many different sites, as the structures of the modern state and society complexify and the points of social antagonism proliferate' (1988a: 168).

In this sense, CRTV is a site for the hegemonic struggle, for the negotiated consensus and the process of producing knowledge, which provides an indication about how power relations are organised in a society, in the domain of culture. The regulation of SARFT shows that the centralist government is intervening in the production of such representations, which indicates that the government is fighting for cultural hegemony. Therefore, in order to examine the process of negotiation, it is important to look at regulatory acts, reactions to it, and the change in the show, such as the representation of rural youth. Change is stimulated due to controversy, negotiation results in a genuine accommodation.

It needs to be noted, influenced by Karl Marx but rejecting class reductionism, Gramsci's concept of hegemony has not only a class dimension, but also a national-popular dimension. In order to achieve national leadership, a class must 'take into account the popular and democratic demands and struggles of the people which do not have a purely class character' (Roger Simon 1982:24-5 this includes ethnic minorities, young people,

and students. The notion of this national-popular dimension is useful for analysing *TEP*, which has urban, rural, and ethnic teenagers as participants. It is also useful for understanding the hegemonic struggle in the intricate Chinese society. Chinese society has ten social strata defined and decided on by the state, and it is urban-rural divided and populated by multiple ethnic groups including the Han group as the majority and the 55 other ethnic minorities (Chapter 1). However, it is noticed that Chinese urban youth and rural youth have been assigned with a potential social strata in the future due to the difference of accessing the 'proper' culture (Chapter 5).

Further, in order to win hegemonic consent, the ideas of the ruling group are naturalised and appear as common sense. For example, the urban-rural divide is presented as natural and unavoidable but only temporary, because 'our society is in the middle of development and transition'. Therefore, the market-driven urbanisation is expected to be continued. Common sense, as Hall and O'Shea state, is 'a form of popular, easily available knowledge. ...It is pragmatic and empirical, giving the illusion of arising directly from experience, reflecting only the realities of daily life and answering the needs of 'the common people' for practical guidance and advice' (2013:8-9). Common sense, as a form of popular knowledge, appears to be natural, but it never is, it is always arbitrary, always socially produced. It is, then, finally, ideological, 'the power of the dominant classes is maintained partly to the extent that their ideas can be made into the common sense of all classes' (John Fiske 1990:95). The ideas and strategies of the ruling class appear to be 'common sense', appear to be 'true'. A policy appears to be what needs to be done, and wins people's consent to the social order that it is promoting. As Fiske says, 'if the ideas of the ruling class can be accepted as common (i.e. not class-based) sense, then their ideological object is achieved and their ideological work is disguised' (ibid: 176). The people's consent to the common wisdom is a hegemonic victory, if only a momentary one. Hence, Hall and O'Shea assert that 'the left and the Labour Party must take the struggle over common sense seriously' (2013:22). For them, the left and the Labour Party should be a 'popular educator', grab each opportunity that each crisis provides, to shape an alternative consensus or 'popular philosophy' for resisting the spread of neoliberal ideas. It needs to be noted that Roland Barthes' conception of myth, as a *parole depolitisee* (depoliticised speech) (1972:142), also evolved out of his interest in how everyday common sense was presented as natural, unavoidable and universal. As Barthes argued, the meanings and associations generated by signs aim to construct, uphold and reproduce social divisions as natural and unavoidable. Additionally, common sense was also connected to power relations in society, 'the war against intelligence is always waged in the name of common sense' (Barthes 1973:11). It is the political nature of common sense. Also, Couldry (2008) correctly assesses that neoliberalism, as a form of discourse, operates under the veil of 'common sense' aiming to make people accept 'this is the way things are now' (Fisher and Gilbert 2013:90). Fisher and Gilbert use the concept of 'capitalist realism' to understand neoliberal ideology and its hegemony. For them, capitalist realism 'entails this deep embedding in a world--or set of worlds--in which capitalism is massively naturalised' (ibid).

Further, common sense, as Gramsci argued, is always 'a response to certain problems posed by reality which are quite specific and 'original' in their relevance' (quoted in Hall and O'Shea 2013:9). Common sense, therefore, 'keeps evolving to give meaning to new developments, solve new problems, unravel new dilemmas'(ibid). In my case study of *TEP*, by analysing audience reception, it is clear that their privileging certain common sense assertions is because that they are responding to a certain problem posed by reality in post-Mao China at this historical moment. I argue, it is credited to the socialist ideological fantasy which captures the subject's jouissance and desire.

Finally, discourse analysis is pertinent. I use discourse and discourse analysis in a more general sense. Reading discourses from the state, television producers, participants, intellectuals and audiences; it reflects 'how they establish a field of debate, contend with each other, and privilege particular common-sense framings of an issue' (Hall and O'Shea 2013:17). Therefore, we see the common-sense assertions, such as 'money can't buy you happiness', 'happiness consists in contentment', 'city makes life better', 'modern knowledge changes fate', 'rural youth are usually purer', appearing in different Chinese reality programmes. Discourses argued from different positions are involved in a struggle over the way a topic is expressed or reasoned about. Therefore, it is important to observe how different discourses negotiate and result in a genuine accommodation. Additionally, by analysing the common-sense assertion at the level of consciousness and reason, it offers us a chance to understand the ideological fantasy behind it at the level of the unconscious. As said earlier, the socialist ideological fantasy appears as common-sense assertion because it has captured the people's jouissance and desire.

It should be noted that I am not conducting a Foucauldian analysis of CRTV, because to do so would not be appropriate to my object of study, which observes the operation of Zizekian 'ideological fantasy'. Foucault does not use the concept of ideology, or Hegelian Marxism, in his work. Having said that, Foucault of course had a very influential and interesting definition of 'discourse', and tried to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice). To this end he developed the concept of the 'discursive formation' (1972). Discourse, for Foucault, is a 'system of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which we speak' (Iara Lessa 2006). In following his approach, the regulatory acts of SARFT could be argued to be part of a 'discursive formation'. However, as criticized by Zizek, the fallacy of Foucault's theory is that 'he had never clearly described the concrete mechanism of how the semblance of a Summit emerges from the micro-physics, micro-practices power' (1994a:12). Therefore, I argue that SARFT is better understood as functioning as an ISA.

Why Marxist and Psychoanalytic Theory?

As stated earlier, though the doctrine of the market is dominating the society, China is still after all a socialist state. The contradiction between the individual-, competition- centred neoliberal ideology and the collective-, harmonious- oriented socialist ideology is experienced as an inevitable and daunting challenge. It suggests that China is still

strongly locked into an ideological struggle that is well served analytically by the work of the theorists I am using, such as Gramsci, as well as Bourdieu, and most importantly, Zizek.

For this study, Marxist theories are useful, as Marxism concerns itself with identifying the class position and class interests concealed within particular forms of knowledge. There have been criticisms of the work of Marx/Gramsci/Hall from a variety of positions. However, academics, particularly in the UK and US (for example: Fukuyama 1992; Giddens 1994), are talking about 'post politics' as though the old divisions of left and right do not work anymore. There are many attempts to find new theoretical paradigms often underpinned by the work of the theorists such as Bergson and Deleuze. There are also attempts to find new forms of politics (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Certainly there are good reasons for taking this position if we look at how the political parties in the UK and US are functioning. Also the emphasis on the individual that is very strong in neoliberalism comes from this position. The post politics, post race, post gender theorising of the UK and US ties in beautifully with neoliberal capitalism.

So, the question is, is China in the same position? China is introducing the neoliberal market. But China is still committed at some level to be a socialist state, and its history is mobilised to justify contemporary policies. Besides, in the Chinese context, the most palpable antagonisms between rich and poor, urban and rural are indicating the one between the reconstituted capitalist and working class. As Zizek points out, class antagonism is 'the very antagonism of human societies' (1994a:22), and amongst the series of struggles (economic, political, feminist, ecological, ethnic, etc.), class struggle, 'while it is part of the chain, secretly overdetermines its very horizon' (Butler, Laclau, and Zizek 2000:320). In the government's trying to solve the social consequences induced by the market, the communist struggles of the past are a very powerful ideological presence in contemporary debate and policy in China. This unique history functions at both conscious and unconscious level. Therefore, it is useful to apply Gramsci and Zizek's theory because of the sharp contradictions thrown up by the position of contemporary China. China seems to be in a form well understood by their theories. It actually suggests again that the economic base determines the superstructure, so the theories in play reproduce the conditions of existence of the particular society. However, it is not in a smooth way necessarily, there are contradictions as discussed in this study. In general, Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as a practical strategy, is helpful for understanding how 'ideology in-itself' operates at the level of consciousness and reason. Zizek, with his concept of ideological fantasy, clarifies how 'ideology in-and-for itself' operates at the level of the unconscious. Thus, I side with Marxist theory as demonstrated in the work of Gramsci and Zizek, especially Zizek's notion of ideology as ideology in-itself, ideology for-itself, and ideology in-and-for itself.

Sources of Evidence

In order to discuss the cultural politics of CRTV in the Chinese context, I look at what is said and what is not, what is reaffirmed, concealed, and what is camouflaged. The

discourses from different positions are therefore relevant. I conduct audience interviews (in-depth and focus group) as my primary material. I also collect data such as Regulations announced by SARFT, critiques published in newspapers, and the other secondary material from the Internet, such as personal and official Blogs, fan sites and online chat-rooms. Reading these different discourses speaking from different positions, helps in the understanding of the role of the state, the position of the audience, the productions of television channels in relation to this, and finally the role of CRTV facing the neoliberal market.

The Voice of the Audience

For decades, the entire debate about whether the audience is active (Morley 1992) or passive was about how to refine social scientific research, and then about what kinds of assumptions and conclusions could be made in cultural and critical work. However, any audience at a given moment ranges from a very active member on one end of a spectrum to a very passive one at the other end. Levels of activity/passivity can vary by the second, the minute, from day to day, month to month, and year to year. This makes a certain amount of audience analysis very difficult except in crude ways of measuring who watches, asking what they remember, how they interpret it, etc.

However, despite what has been said, the discourse of the audience does play a role in the course of forming a consensus. For the case study of *TEP*, investigating audience reception offers an opportunity to see how the audiences that come from different communities, i.e. urban and rural community, with an alternative frame of reference, consent to a representation because the socialist ideological fantasy captures their *jouissance* and desire in different ways. This phenomenon can be explored by looking at the common-sense assertion they privilege. The audience in my case functions as an example, representing the subject, the Chinese people, in the post-Mao era.

Therefore, It is important to note that I am not undertaking traditional audience research at the level of aesthetics, which would lead to more analysis about the form of *TEP*. What I am probing into is the audiences' attitude towards the rural people and countryside in daily life at this particular historical moment. I am endeavoring to explain how they respond to a certain problem posed by the reality of the urban-rural divide. It is less a matter of how audiences engage with the text via 'textual poaching' (Jenkins 1992), and more about figuration of all the tensions in *TEP*, audience research being simply part of that analysis. In my thesis, the balance tips towards seeing the position of the audience (as demonstrated in the primary research carried out), and the content and form of *TEP*, as symptomatic of the ideological struggles and contradictions of post-Mao China. See, for example, chapter 6's analysis of the comments of the audience under the pseudonym *Old Gao Zhanxi*. Analysing the audience reception of these programmes reveals the dream that welds the mythologised heroic past to the harsh present of neoliberal capitalism.

For the purpose of this research, I adopt in-depth interviews. It enables a probing into personal and sensitive perceptions and attitudes in connection with media texts and life

experience. The focus-group interview was conducted as well by a snowball sampling strategy. It enables direct observation of the social production of meaning, consensus and the mobilisation of common-sense assertion, as interviewees negotiate their readings of media material.² Both the in-depth interview and the focus-group interview were audio-recorded. In total, I have collected and transcribed approximately 17 hours of recorded material: about 2 hours for each focus-group interview and 1 to 1.5 hours for each in-depth interview.

Rather than sketching a range of different audiences, my interview focused on deliberately selected interviewees. There are three chosen categories for interviewing the audience: a) audience members who have moved to the city from the countryside; b) audience members who were born and raised in the city; c) audience members who have direct contact with the rural youth or are familiar with rural-related policy.

In total, I have interviewed eight people by means of the personal one-to-one interview. Four of them, coded as C1, C2, C3, C4, are audience members born and raised in the city, including a principal of one middle school for migrant workers' children, a creator and manager of an online fan forum of *TEP*, and a primary school teacher. Another four, coded as D1, D2, D3, D4, are audience members born in the countryside and have moved to the city years ago, including a university student, a retired government official, and an engineer.³

Four focus-group interviews are carried out in two cities, Wuhu in Anhui province and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, with two groups in each city, in total 19 people were involved. Also, Hangzhou city has bigger territory, has better economic development than Wuhu city. All the members are people who have moved to the city from the rural areas, to work or study in the city at the moment. They are arranged in two groups based on their age in the interview year 2011: 20--35yo group and 36--50yo group. Each group includes 4--6 people, with male and female mixed together, who have different occupations and different education backgrounds. Four video clips (10 minutes of each) from *TEP* are used as visual prompts.

I also complemented my primary material by collecting data from personal and programme Blogs and follow-up comments. According to Hall and O'Shea, 'we have to capture discourse which is volunteered, which arises from the writer's own set of concerns, and is as spontaneous and unfettered by what others may think as possible. Online comments are rather like this, especially as everyone contributes under a pseudonym' (2013:16-7). Online comments can be seen as spontaneous and authentic, and demonstrate 'an energy that comes from genuine anger, irony, moving accounts of people's own difficulties, unashamed prejudice, etc.' (ibid: 17). Therefore, I have chosen to use the secondary material from the 149 comments in response to a personal Blog and in total 560 comments from *TEP* official Blog, to supplement my audience interview.

² See Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview.

³ For all the personal information of interviewees, please see Appendix 1.

As demonstrated in this study, audience reception is still useful in observing their privileging of certain common-sense assertions and in analysing how the subject's jouissance and desire are captured in the social fantasy.

The Structure of the Thesis

It is the historical, political, social, ideological contexts that make the palpable difference between Chinese and Western RTV. Chapter 1, therefore, is devoted to explain the context of the post-Mao era at this particular historical moment. Chapter 2 includes three sections of literature review: neoliberalism and socialism; hegemony and ideological fantasy; and finally, the revelation, representation and intervention of Western RTV. Chapter 3 clarifies the contradiction and discomfort of SARFT when it intervenes in the CRTV market. Chapter 4 explains how and why the socialist morality is worked into dating shows and contributes to the formation of cynicism, another key characteristic of neoliberalism. Chapter 5 and 6 are devoted to the case study of *TEP*. My position as a former television editor/presenter and media-related background provides me with a special insight and a sharp eye for textual analysis, as well as useful skills for conducting interviews. Chapter 5 identifies a socialist ideological fantasy and elaborates how it constructs social reality. In Chapter 6, I prove again the existence of the socialist ideological fantasy by traversing it, i.e. Identifying with a symptom, and further analyse how it constructs the subject.

CRTV becomes a site demonstrating that the market threatens the state's sovereignty, 'in the name of a postulated connection between democracy and the market' (Bourdieu 2003:86), and revealing the social and moral crisis induced by the market. The originality of this thesis is to observe how the neoliberal market is both legitimised and resisted by the government and socialist ideology in post-Mao China. The market, not only suggests a capitalist system, but, 'as an extra-ideological coercion, is an ideological gesture par excellence' (Žižek 1994a:14). This notion of the market allows me to analyse the hegemonic struggle, the common-sense assertion at the level of consciousness, and to retroactively trace the unconscious fantasy.

Chapter One

Post-Mao China as Research Context

Introduction

As argued in the Introduction, the difference of CRTV from its Western counterparts is based on the specific context of post-Mao China----a socialist country that is introducing neoliberal market. Therefore, it is important to situate this research within the Chinese context.

China is a multi-ethnic, one party, socialist country that is speeding up modernisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and marketisation around the nation. It has a 1.3 billion population consisting of 56 ethnic groups. In China, the importance of being modern is very much emphasised, with reference to advanced Western countries. Therefore, neoliberalism was introduced in China during the Open Reform starting in 1978 for accelerating modernisation. Although we may celebrate the great achievements of this market-oriented reform over the last 36 years, we cannot neglect the most serious social problems, particularly the urban-rural divide. The successful and rapid growth of the state's fiscal capacity has not benefited rural residents. Scholars generally agree that China has long adopted a development strategy that is biased against the peasants' interests (Jean C. Oi 1993; Lv Xinyu 2008). For better understanding the representation and intervention of *TEP*, it is important to highlight the specific nature of the urban-rural divide within this study. Besides, expanding urbanisation is taken as a major strategy of soothing the urban-rural divide and constructing new countryside. However, the in situ urbanisation of the countryside is more likely to produce the new slums, especially at urban-rural border areas. Also, the poor in the city, such as the unemployed, the underclass, the people with low pay, would move in and inhabit these urban-rural borders together with peasants. Therefore, the rich versus the poor actually implies the reconstituted capitalist (the managers, the entrepreneurs) and the proletariat (the peasantry, migrant peasant workers, unemployed workers, city dweller workers). The urban-rural, rich-poor antagonism, then, can be seen as a trope of the dominant antagonism----class antagonism.

In response to the need to suture the class division, create a sense of belonging and social stability amongst its people, the terms 'Chinese nation' (Landis and Albert 2012; Zhao 2000), family, and harmonious society have been promulgated everywhere by the central government. However, such attempts to emphasize the discourses of harmony in a huge Chinese family only show that social rifts still exist. Coupled with accelerated neoliberal urbanisation, these social divisions and contradictions are becoming increasingly problematic in post-Mao China. These issues could lead to a change of ideology, values and identity.

To understand the complexity surrounding these areas, including contradictions and

contests faced by both the state and the people, it is important to obtain a clearer picture of the post-Mao Chinese context. This includes the political, social, cultural context, the media system and the reality television market. This background information is pivotal in rationalising the methodology and conducting the discussions within individual chapters.

The Chinese Political System

China is a one party-state with the Communist Party of China (CPC)⁴ as the only ruling party. The leading bodies of the party are the CPC National Congress and the CPC Central Committee.

While the West is capitalist within the context of social democracy, China adopts a unique kind of democratic political system, referred to as the 'people's democratic dictatorship'----the combination of democracy among the people with dictatorship over the reactionaries, the enemy. It claims that it is not a liberal, bourgeois democracy, which worships individual and personal freedom as a fetish, but people's democracy that is led by the proletariat and based on a worker-peasant alliance. As the Constitution states, 'the People's Republic of China (PRC) is a socialist country, led by the working class, based on the alliance of workers and peasants. The power of PRC belongs to its people and the organ for the people to exercise state power is the National People's Congress (NPC) and local people's congresses at all levels.' NPC and local people's congresses are established through democratic elections, responsible to and supervised by the people. NPC meets in session once a year and is convened by its Standing Committee. State administrative, judicial and procuratorialthe organs are created by, responsible to and supervised by the People's congresses. Additionally, NPC and local people's congresses must be led by CPC, support CPC's policy decisions such as political principles, political orientations, important decisions, and recommendation to the national authorities of the important cadres. By statutory procedures, CPC's advocacy will become national will to mobilise all the people to follow and implement.

Reconstitution of Class Power and Social Strata

After 1949, it was said that the working class has been liberated from the position of being exploited and became the leading class at the helm of the state, in the newly founded China. However, when the central government plans to develop the economy, it must assign professionals to manage and mobilise the means of production which belongs to the state and the proletariat. Due to the power they possess, these managers of state-own enterprises (SOEs) gradually become the powerful vested interest. The means of production legally belonging to the state and its people is, in fact, under the control of these interest groups and a minority of managers. Since 1983, SOEs were also granted greater managerial autonomy from state ownership. Compared to the proletarian majority, the managers have various privileges such as access to information and organisation which make it much easier for them to join together and hunt to expand their profit by means such as system reform and privatisation, which can also be facilitated by their

⁴ It was called the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the period of Chinese Civil War, until it expelled the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP) and founded the new China in 1949.

power and eventually maximise their personal gain. Thus, they become what public choice theory⁵ has described----rational self-interested individuals, not public interest servants.

Additionally, since 1993, the state has decided to convert the most important of SOEs into share-based co-operatives. David Harvey points out, 'as local governments transferred shares of enterprises to management as part of their restructuring strategy, so many managers have overnight come to hold shares worth tens of millions of yuan (*Chinese currency, same as RMB*) through various means, forming a new group of tycoons' (2005:145). The managers sometimes received a yearly salary one hundred times that of their average worker, as well as being given significant portions of the shares. Historically, the possession and the management of the means of production belong to and service the capitalist minority. That is why Mao had stressed that it is important to prevent the restoration of the powerful capitalist within communist party. However, it is palpable that the powerful capitalist has gradually formed again in post-Mao China. In addition, accompanying this is the reconstitution of working class, including both the urban workers and migrant peasant workers. They are all at the bottom of the social ladder. By official count from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the number of the migrant peasant workers has increased to 262.61 million in 2012.⁶

Further, SOEs used to provide job security and social protection for their workforces, but in 1983 they were allowed to hire 'contract workers' with no social protections and limited tenure (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2004:38). The 'iron rice bowl' was broken, especially, 'between 1998 and 2002, 27million workers were let go from SOEs' (Harvey 2005:144)⁷. These sacked workers are the underprivileged group within the urban sectors. The ever-glorious strong communist worker is now only a poster on the wall; the manager and the entrepreneur are admired as the modern group. Noticeably and interestingly, it was also in 2000 when RTV started its journey in China. What CRTV reveals about this society at different moments certainly has social reasons.

Since the Open Reform, the accelerated market economy has been causing uneven

⁵ See literature review, Chapter 2

⁶ Gov.cn (2013) *Investigation Report on Peasant Workers in 2012*. [online] available from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/jdfx/t20130527_402899251.htm>[27 May 2013]

⁷ Being a worker in China used to have a security of life long tenure. It is called 'iron rice bowl'. However, since SOEs took reform in 1993, the positions they offer have reduced. That means certain percentage of workers have no work to do, even they are today still officially listed as a worker belonging to this SOE. The so-called 'iron rice bowl' is broken. Therefore, the normal solution is, the SOE pays certain money to buy back, compensate the tenure. Moreover, the workers have to accept this condition, officially leave the job, and go find employment independently. It was a big issue in the Chinese cities, where SOEs usually locate. Additionally, during the period of reform, the state-owned small and medium enterprises that had been losing money were asked to file for bankruptcy or collapse, which resulted in a group of up to 6-8 millions workers losing their job. The issue of the unemployed ex-workers suggests a social trauma, the laid-off workers.

benefit distribution across different social groups, which increasingly deepens the economic disparity. Therefore, the state and the scholars have provided a new categorisation of social strata. In the *Contemporary China Social Strata Research Report* published in 2002, scholar Lu Xueyi and his fellow researchers, based on occupations and the possession of organizational, economic and cultural resources, divided ten social strata⁸:

1. National and social administrative board, estimated at 2.1% out of the entire social strata's structure
2. Manager stratum, approximately 1.5%
3. Private entrepreneurs, account for 0.6%
4. Professional technician, 5.1%
5. Official clerks, about 4.8%
6. Individual industrial and commercial households, approximately 4.2%
7. Commercial service workers, 12%
8. Industrial workers, 22.6%
9. Agricultural worker, i.e. peasants, currently China's largest sector, account for 44% of the total labor force
10. Rural and urban unemployed, underemployed stratum, 3.1%.

Chinese seem to belong to a united leading class but fall into ten different strata. Roughly, we could put stratum 1 through 3 in the box of the rich echelon, while the stratum 7 through 10 fit in the category of the poor. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the materialistic discourse and the antagonism between rich and poor is reflecting the economic structures of class inequality. And although the increasing inequality exists within both the urban and the rural sectors, the urban-rural disparity can generally still be seen as exemplifying the rich-poor disparity, which is represented in *TEP*.

The Urban-Rural Divide

The following clarifies the historical, politico-economic and cultural factors that result in the formation of the urban-rural divide. This section is important, because *TEP* would not be what it is if there was no such urban-rural divide and the ideological baggage that is involved as the specific context.

Industrialisation and Farmers' Sacrifice

China has a long-term desire for modernisation. It was the armaments of the imperialists, during the First Opium War (1840-42) and the Second Opium War (1856-60), which made China so eager to embrace modernisation. Hence, it is not surprising that the early stage of modernisation, represented by the Westernisation Movement⁹ during the late Qing

⁸ Zhao Jintian (2002) 'Ten Social Strata of Chinese People'. *China.com* [online] 30 January. available from <http://news.china.com/zh_cn/domestic/945/20020130/10201677_1.html>[30 January 2002]

⁹ Westernisation Movement was conducted by some officers of the Qing government in power from 1860s until 1890s. They believed that learning Western advanced technology can help to maintain the crumbling feudal ruling of Qing dynasty. They were engaged in foreign affairs such as making treaties, sending students, purchasing Western munitions, training army following Western ways, learning

dynasty (1861-94), was built on a demand for the development of a munitions industry (Lv 2004). The Qing government realised that only a powerful munitions industry could protect the country from being invaded. After the new China was founded, Mao also started the process of Chinese industrialisation. The consensus of the central government at that time was that the survival of the state would be assured through the development of munitions and heavy industry.

In 1950, the Korean War began, and Western countries, led by America, concurrently formed an economic blockade on China. Under the multiple pressures, the central government decided to draw lessons from the former Soviet Union. The capitalist states' wealth and capital to develop industry were originally gained through the appropriation of its colonies. However, China could only gain resources to support industrialisation through the toils of its peasantry, echoing Stalinism. Policies such as 'state monopolisation for purchase and marketing' and 'price scissors'¹⁰ are simply products of Stalinism.

In socialist China, the central government once controlled every aspect of agriculture including production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. The government appropriated all surpluses, transforming them into primary capital to develop urban industry. Price scissor in the exchange of industrial products for agricultural products were the main rule to achieve this target and applied under the state's obligatory administration. It stipulates that industrial products are sold to farmers with a price higher than the real value; meanwhile, agricultural products are sold to the state with price far lower than the market price. At the 2nd Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee in November 1956, Chairman Mao pointed out:

Some comrades want to eliminate 'price scissors' soon. It is impossible. Currently, earnings from the price scissors account for 30% of state financial revenue. Considering that the average nation-wide agricultural tax only takes up 10%, it would affect the state's fiscal revenue if we eliminate price scissors and practice normal equivalent exchange.

According to calculations conducted by the Chinese Rural Development Research Centre of the State Council, during the planned economy period from 1953 until 1978, the central government gained 600-800billion RMB from the price scissors. Compared to the 900billion RMB of national industrial fixed assets in 1978, Chen Guili and Chuntao (2004:190-191) believe that the original capital accumulation of Chinese national industrialisation came from agriculture. Even after the Opening Reform, farmers were continuously burdened with the increasing price scissors.

Western science, using machinery, mining and setting up factories, etc.

¹⁰ Price scissor stipulates, in the exchange of industrial products for agricultural products, industrial products are sold to farmers with a price higher than the real value, meanwhile, agricultural products are sold to the state with price far lower than the market price.

The Formation of the Urban-Rural Dichotomized Social Structure

In 1945 Mao said it as follows in his lengthy report *On Coalition Government*:

Farmers are the precursors of factory workers. Millions upon millions of farmers will move into cities and work in factories. If China needs to establish a powerful national industry and many modern cities, then it is the necessary process to convert rural residents to urban residents.

The central government knew that the farmers should move into the city to strengthen the development of industrialisation and urbanisation. Besides, Mao soon realised that the new China had too large a population, 0.6 billion at that time, and too little arable land, 1.6 billion mu (Chinese land measure, approximately 0.2636 billion acre). It implies that large numbers of surplus farmer laborers would move into cities, which could increase the difficulty in urban administration. Mao thought that it would be prudent gradually to reduce the difference between urban and rural areas, workers and farmers. Mao suggested at the Zhengzhou Meeting, 'how can we reduce the farming population? Rather than having the farmers move into cities, we should develop local industries in the rural areas, where the farmers can become workers locally' (1958). Mao was expecting that the upsurge of township and village enterprises (TVEs) could provide enough employment opportunities for surplus rural laborers. Since then the urban-rural dichotomized social structure has been gradually formed.

The State Council announced *Temporary Provision on Recruiting Workers from the Rural Areas for Various Labor Units* in December 1957, which prevented the recruitment of farmers or the employment of farmers who move into cities without permission. It cuts off opportunities for farmers to seek jobs in cities. Additionally, accompanied with the state's monopoly on the trade of grain in 1953, the government began the planned supply of grain. It pronounced that the state was only responsible for supplying grain and oil to urban registered residents. This provision eliminated the possibility of the rural residents to get grain and oil supply in cities.

The Standing Committee of the 1st National People's Congress passed in the 91st meeting, *The Household Register Regulation of PRC*, on 9th January 1958, Paragraph 2 of Article 10 puts it like this:

Citizens who move from the rural areas to the urban areas must hold employment contracts issued by the urban labor departments or units, urban school's admission letters or relocation permission issued by the urban residence registration authorities. They are also required to report to the domicile household registration authorities and apply for relocation procedures.

It indicates the formation of a Chinese internal migration system with strict restrictions on rural-urban migration at the core. Notably, the basic right of free choice of residence and

free migration of citizens issued by Constitution of 1954 was eradicated in this provision while it still referring to the people as 'citizens'.

China has a population of 1.3 billion where 900 million are farmers. While agricultural production and TVEs might require slightly more than 100 million employees, there is a 3-400 million surplus workforce. The 16th CPC National Congress (2002) acknowledges that 'it is an inevitable trend during the process of industrialisation and modernization that surplus rural laborers will migrate to non-agricultural areas.' Labor mobility has increased very rapidly since the 1990s owing to a fast-growing urban economy and to the concurrent relaxation of labor-mobility restrictions. The figure of labor migrants from rural to urban areas in China stood at 127 million by the end of 2005, reached 262.61 million in 2012¹¹. In many rural families, both of parents are going out to work in the city, only their children and elders are left in the countryside. These children have to bear the responsibility of household chores as well as take care of siblings and their elders, whilst their parents rarely come back from their efforts to earn money. This phenomenon has become a heated social issue. In *TEP*, most of the rural youth participants come from such families.

Besides, the urban-rural dichotomized system based on the Household Registered Residence System differentiates the rights of urban residents from that of rural residents in many aspects, including labor insurance and benefits, numerous subsidies, housing, food supply, children education, medical care, pension, employment, marriage, conscription, etc. As Wang Hui (2003) points out, 'this structural inequality quickly transformed itself into disparities in income among different classes, social strata, and regions, leading rapidly to social polarization' (quoted in Harvey 2005:142-43). It is the birthright of urban citizens to hold a superior social status and a practical criteria, which distinguishes the urban class, as first class, from the peasantry, as second class. Herein, migrant peasant workers are suffering from unfair treatment whilst working in the city. They all desire to hold an urban registered residence.¹² People are assigned to urban or rural categories, therefore, are conceptualised as sharing two common collective identities, urban resident or rural resident. For rural youth, being admitted by a university is the only legit way of changing identity, because, after graduation, he/she could find a job in a city, stay in the city and change their registered residence. The common-sense assertion of 'modern knowledge changes fate' that is very strong in society and reflected in *TEP* comes from this situation.

Over-taxation, Excessive fees and Apportionments

As to the taxation bias, Tao Ran and Liu Mingxing (2005) argue that, at least after the 1990s, Chinese farmers have paid a significantly higher share of their income in the form of direct tax and fees compared to their urban counterparts, which includes township and

¹¹ See footnote 8

¹² Chongqing municipal government started the Household Registration System Reform in August 2010, with the goal of changing 10 million rural residents to urban residents. There are some doubts amongst the public as to if it is another way to occupy the farmers' land, the new enclose movement. However, for many peasant workers who have been living in cities for many years, it is suitable for their desire.

village social infrastructure apportionments, public service expenses, local government employee subsidies, school, medical care, and the like. According to *China Labor Watch* (18 November 2004), 'rural governments get almost no support from wealthier areas. They tax local farmers and impose endless fees to finance schools, hospitals, road building, even the police' (quoted in Harvey 2005:144).

An example of this would be that compulsory education provides free nine years basic schooling for every child. It is the state's responsibility and obligation to offer sufficient investment for compulsory education for all school-age children. However, villages and local government have financially supported the rural education system since 1985. The central and provincial governments are only in charge of a very small proportion of the total expenditure. Particularly after the new tax reform started in 1994¹³, since the local government has not enough money to support rural education system, it relies much more on the farmers to pay teachers' salary, building maintenance, etc., by means of education added fees and apportionments. Many rural children had to drop out of school because the family cannot afford the costs. Wang Shanmai (2000) points out that central and provincial finances invested less than 3% in total for rural education in 1999, while county, town and farmers raised 97%. It was another burden for the rural population. Because that it is very difficult for rural children to go to school, it paves the way for the formation of the common-sense assertion that 'modern knowledge changes fate', which is addressed repeatedly in *TEP* (Chapter 6).

The unfair tax-fee burdens were perceived as a source of rural unrest and instability, local protests, and the deterioration of relationships between village cadres and the rural residents¹⁴. After the early attempts to relieve villagers' burdens failed, the central government proposed a new reform in 2000, which was officially conducted nationwide in 2002, called the Tax-for-Fee Reform. This eliminated local fees in favor of a single agricultural tax. Ray Yep (2004) argues that the Tax-for-Fee Reform had the support and political commitment of the central government all the way down to the township. However, without the education apportionments paid by the farmers, county- and township-government could not support the local compulsory education plan due to their weak fiscal capacity. Rural education was in danger. In the 4th Plenary Session of the 9th NPC in 2001,

¹³ In 1994, the central government conducted a major reform known as the Tax-Sharing System, which marked with revenue centralisation without corresponding changes in disbursements. As Tao Ran, Yang Kaizhong and Liu Mingxing elucidate, 'the response of provincial governments was to squeeze even larger shares of revenues from lower-level governments and at the same time to assign more responsibilities for expenditure to them' (2009:360). Many county- and township-level governments had to lay out most of their received subsidies on wages for government employees, and little was left for local public goods and services. Therefore, the farmers were left to fund public services expenditures.

¹⁴ According to Chen, 'the taxes from the farmers increased from 8.79 billion in 1990 to 46.53 billion in 2000. The per capita tax of farmers was 146 RMB while that of urban dwellers was only 37 RMB. Given that the urban resident's income was 6 times higher than that of rural resident on average, the tax paid by farmers was an overwhelming 4 times higher than that of urban residents' (2004:150-51).

Deputy Hu Pingping¹⁵ proposed that it is necessary to change the Compulsory Education Law, and increase the investment on rural education. In NPC of 2007, she further proposed that it is essential to ensure that the education subsidies accounts for 4% of GDP in 2010. However, due to the lack of political representation in NPC, such proposal in favor of rural people seems to lack strong support.

The Lack of Political Representation in Rural Populations

China's current political framework guarantees urban populations more political representation and power in local policy-making. As stated above, NPC and the other levels of people's congresses are the organisations through which citizens exercise their power, and composed of deputies elected from provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and the armed forces. All the ethnic minorities are also entitled to appropriate representation. The proportional distribution of representatives of NPC is based on the population of the demarcated political zones. The ratio of urban versus rural residents in 1953 was 13:87. The Election Law, passed in 1953, decided that the ratio of populations represented by the rural and urban deputies in NPC would be 8:1----one rep for 800 thousand rural citizens versus one per every 100 thousand in urban centers. Deng Xiaoping explained at the 22nd Session of the Central People's Government Council on 11th February 1953:

While the regulation may not be entirely fair, it truly reflects the present reality. It guarantees that all minorities and classes will have suitable representation in all levels of congresses. It is both reasonable and essential to have a transitional process from this to a more equitable solution.

Thus, larger municipalities like Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin received much more representation compared to agricultural provinces such as Henan, Anhui, Jiangxi, and Hebei. The politically weak rural population therefore lacked the support to block legislations favorable to urban areas. The ratio of urban versus rural residents in 1995 was 30:70. Therefore the central government changed the Election Law and reset the ratio from 8:1 to 4:1. According to statistics, the urban versus rural resident in 2008 was 45.7% and 53.7%. During the annual session of China's parliament in March of 2010, the Election Law was changed again adjusting the ratio to 1:1. It was the turning point in changing the urban-rural political disparity. The political guarantee of equal representation strengthened the voice of rural citizens improving their political, economic, educational, social and cultural rights¹⁶.

¹⁵ Deputy Hu Pingping submitted three proposals respectively in 2001, 2005 and 2007 concerning the rural education. Respectively, [online] available from

<<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/7501/7555/20020304/678410.html>>[4 March 2002]

<http://www.china.com.cn/zhuant/2005/txt/2005-03/12/content_5809453.htm>[12 March 2005]

<<http://learning.sohu.com/20070304/n248494940.shtml>>[4 March 2007]

¹⁶ The 11th NPC in February 2008 for first time has three peasant worker deputies. It is the only three peasant worker deputies in more than 2000 deputies. It means that migrant peasant worker used to be a disenfranchised group with no representative to speak for themselves, protect their own rights in NPC

Stigmatisation of Migrant Peasant Workers as Outsiders

Long term price scissors, over-taxation and institutional determinants, enlarged the urban–rural disparity. The resulting impoverishment, under-development and lowered productivity incentives lead the peasant-workers to seek jobs in cities. Migration is the oldest course of action against poverty (John Kenneth Galbraith 1979). According to John R. Harris and Michael P. Todaro (1970), the decision to migrate is based on expected income differentials between rural and urban areas. Rural–to-urban migration is regarded as a measure to alleviate poverty. However, due to the urban-rural class differences, peasant-workers are unfairly treated upon their arrival, with urban media, established in cities, citing them as outsiders.

Besides, many city dwellers ‘fear’ such ‘deluges’ of ‘outsiders’ into their communities. Urban media, with its city-centric consciousness, expresses this concern by presenting peasant workers as potential criminals with deleterious effects on urban stability and administration. This clearly illustrates the stigmatisation and stereotyping of peasant folk. The increased mobilisation of farmer-laborers becomes a threat to the urban residents, who see them as ‘the other’, while the central government strives to construct a harmonious society. The antagonism that prevails is caused by social divisions existing between these two groups defined by perceived status and the overall, ‘Them versus Us’ attitude. It is exactly the logic that produces *TEP*, as will be discussed in Chapter 5 and 6. Even the rural fathers who serve their time in prison are presented in the show as a proof and a warning.

The rejection of peasant/migrant workers dates back to 1957, in the *Temporary Provision on Recruiting Workers from the Rural Areas for Various Labor Units* announced by the State Council. It says, ‘all sorts of units are not allowed to recruit workers from the rural areas or personally employ peasants who blindly flow from rural to urban areas.’ The former name of migrant peasant workers, ‘mang liu’, just came from the phrase ‘blindly flow’. In Chinese, character ‘mang’ meaning ‘blind’, ‘liu’ meaning ‘flow’. Sheng Hong (2000) explains:

We would have the phrase ‘liu mang’ after changing the order of ‘mang liu’. ‘Liu mang 流盲’ has the exact same pronunciation in Chinese as another phrase ‘流氓’, which means ‘rogue’ in English. It brings to mind a group of people that behave in a dishonest or criminal way. The phrase ‘mang liu’ reflects urban peoples unhealthy attitudes, and support their perceived sense of superiority.¹⁷

This can be identified as the first step of ‘Stigmatisation’ (Norbert Elias 1994) of peasant workers. Upon closer examination of the phrase ‘peasant worker’: ‘peasant’ represents their identity as a rural resident, ‘worker’ defines their occupation in the city. Peasant worker, therefore, represents the farmer group that has migrated into city to do different

over the last 24 years since peasant worker migration started in 1984.

¹⁷ The similar situation happens to the English words ‘villein’ and ‘villain’ as well.

types of production or maintenance work. Typically, these are dirty, labor intensive jobs related to cleaning-up the city or construction. These are jobs that are essential to the harmonious existence of any city, yet ones that the non-migratory urban residents would never do themselves. Moreover, as the migrant peasant workers, they are denied rights and treatment that the other urban people enjoy. Their presence is barely tolerated and therefore not truly accepted.

Further, it is common that various urban discourses use labeling as a strategy to stigmatise the peasant worker group. Labeling theory (Howard S. Becker 1963) means that, a label initially may only identify one particular individual of one group; it then is applied to that whole group. The alleged subjects are generalised; the connection between the label and the group is also fixed. Therefore, the inflexible quality indicated by the label is taken as the inherent nature of that group. It is the process of stigmatisation. Labeling and stigmatisation help to establish reasonable, legitimate excuse as the reason for fear and rejection between one group and the other. Li Hongtao and Qiao Tongzhou (2005) argue that urban media not only distributes but also ossifies characteristics of peasant worker group, such as bad hygiene, incivility, being unreasonable, disregarding urban norms, criminal acts, mental illness, sexual repression, etc., which can be categorised under four labels----appearance, behavior, morality and weird traits. All these contribute to the fixed discrimination and bias which, when added to discriminatory, political and economic regulations, produce the ossified stigmatisation of the whole peasant group.

As a result, peasant workers were depicted as potential criminals and a problematic group that would affect urban stability. In addition, the media rarely dug deep for the reason of their unrest and ignored their unfair treatment, dangerous working conditions, etc. Besides, in *TEP*, the peasants who stay in their remote rural villages are depicted as harmless, pure, kind-hearted. It seems that urban residents would be fine as long as their farmer 'pals' stay in rural areas and accept their impoverished life. This common consciousness of urban people is reflected in *TEP*.

Political Correctness

Farmers, agriculture and the rural area are called by the central government 'Three Agricultural Issues' which are serious and sensitive issues within the Chinese historical, political and economic context. It is also a sensitive issue with regard to ideological, political correctness when demonstrated by various media. In 2004, the central government, for the first time, announced the strategy of 'a coordinated effort for rural-urban socio-economic development'. It specifically underlines rural area development. Creating a 'new socialist countryside' becomes the main pillars of the central government's new policy framework in the first decade of the 21st century.¹⁸ It

¹⁸ At the 3rd Plenary Session of the 12th Central Committee on 20th October 1984, the central government decided to change the focus of China's reform from rural to urban areas. Following that, a series of urban biased policies aimed to speed up city development came into effect. The rural-urban inequality was reinforced. Then, following the new strategy announced in 2004, the central government

aims to support 900 million farmers to bridge the economic gap. Many relative reports and promulgations have since appeared on various urban media. CCTV's Spring Festival Gala, as the main embodiment of state ideology, also spotlighted the three issues with many skits in 2006. In these skits, rural characters address their urban employers as 'mate'. However, the urban-rural divide, as the grim reality or the traumatic social split, cannot be fixed by this fabricated 'political correct' intimacy. As Lv comments, 'because they [sketches] are not allowed to touch on real social divisions and wounds, they are therefore incapable of satire and parody, reduced to a footnote of the state ideology' (2009:121).

Additionally, urban media is advancing rapidly towards marketisation. The law of market pushes them to cooperate with advertisers and form the clear consensus about their target audience----the urban residents, especially middle class with consuming power. Farmers, with their much lower consuming capacity, are not even considered or taken as the 'other'. They are usually neglected, stigmatised or depicted to fulfill the urban people's imagination or the idea of political correctness, as partially reflected in *TEP*.

Agriculture products support the original capital accumulation of urban industrialisation and grain supply. However, they now are ironically taken as a weight on the economy. Urban residents forget that the farmers are actually producers of state wealth. In the Chinese context, the city becomes the coloniser while the rural area becomes the colony; it is suggestive of a kind of Internal Colonialism.

Values and Ideology

As many of the debates raised by the intellectuals against RTV cite the term 'Chinese values' (see Chapter 3,4,5,6), it is important to identify its definition. Mainly, the discourses of Chinese values are constantly in contradistinction to the Western values, to express a preference for system of government underpinned by moral values, social norms and cultural attitudes said to be derived from philosophical traditions and historical experiences.

Socialist Core Value System (SCVS), as the embodiment of Chinese values, was firstly raised as a scientific proposition in October 2006, the 6th Plenary Session of the 6th Central Committee of CPC. It is an attempt to reform and re-orientate not only Chinese values and outlook in general but more importantly communist ones, promoting communist values as opposite to 'Western capitalist values'. Hu Jintao, the ex-General Secretary, highlighted in his important '6•25 Speech' in 2007, that we should vigorously

released its first major document on the building of a new socialist countryside as the primary task in the eleventh Five-Year Plan period. China's eleventh Five-Year Plan, approved in March 2006 and covering the period 2006–2010, called for stronger support of the rural areas and less developed regions. The central government phased out all agricultural taxes and fees by 2006. It also claimed that in the next few years, more fiscal subsidies would flow from the central government to help build rural infrastructure, strengthen agricultural technology, scrap tuition fees and textbook charges for the children of rural families, and fund the newly set-up rural cooperative medical insurance plan (Tao,Yang, and Liu 2009:356).

construct SCVS, consolidate the common ideological basis for the united struggle of the whole party and the entirety of the Chinese people. SCVS consists of four basic aspects, namely Marxism as guiding ideology, Socialism with Chinese characteristics as the common ideal, the national spirit with patriotism as the core and the Zeitgeist with reform and innovation as the core, finally, the socialist concept on honor and shame with the Eight Honors and Eight Shames (EHES) as its main content. Amongst these, the common socialist ideal is suggesting four modernisations: industry, agriculture, education, science and defense, and was written into the CPC Party Constitution in 1956.

EHES was proposed by Hu Jintao in 4th March 2006, it advocates: 'Honor to those who love the motherland, and shame on those who do harm to her; Honor to those who serve the people, and shame on those who are divorced from them; Honor to those who quest for science, and shame on those who prefer to be ignorant; Honor to those who are hard-working, and shame on those who detest having to work; Honor to those who unite and help people, and shame on those who gain at the expense of others; Honor to those who are honest and trustworthy, and shame on those who forsake good for the sake of gold; Honor to those who are disciplined and law-abiding, and shame on those who violate laws and disciplines; and Honor to those who uphold hard struggle, and shame on those who indulge in a dissipated life.' EHES is believed to make clear boundaries between right and wrong, good and bad, which is dealing with money worshiping, hedonism, dishonesty, fraud, forsaking good for the sake of gold, gaining personal benefit at the expense of the public, and other social hazards. It is expected to provide basic values and behavioral norms for the entire society and to ensure the healthy development of the socialist market economy.¹⁹

Radio and TV System in China

Media in China, especially the press, radio and television, has always been required to be responsible and committed to national development, must give their support by publishing 'positive news' about the government, its development policies and projects. The whole system is set up under the political leadership of CPC.

The development and reform of Chinese Radio and TV system is divided into three stages by Liu Chengfu (2007:1-24).²⁰ The first phase is the foundation and initial development period spanning 1940--1983. In 1983, in the 11th National Radio and TV Broadcast Conference, the central government decided to gradually cut off the financial provisions and subsidies of the Radio and TV system. It, for the first time, asked the radio and

¹⁹ Since October 2002, CCTV has been organising an annual event called *Touching China*, in which moral models were chosen and awarded, including people's servant Zheng Peimin, aerospace hero Yang Liwei, one-arm hero Ding Xiaobing, loving heart singer Cong Fei, township postman Wang Shunyou, caring military medic Hua Yiwei, self-reliant college student Hong Zhanhui and the Red Army Group who participated the Long March 70 years ago, etc. By showing these figures as special cultural identities, it is expected to convey a belief and spirit to interpret further the essence of SCVS.

²⁰ The broadcast of Harbin Radio in 1926 is seen as the starting point of Radio in China, while the establishment of Beijing TV in 1958 is taken as the beginning of Chinese television broadcast.

television institutions to gradually take full responsibility for profits and losses. The second phase was the initial reform period of 1984—1991, during which, the Radio and TV system had been transforming from publicity institutions under political leadership to those operating under industrial management and following the law of market economy. They began to operate the same as an enterprise and manage commercial advertisements. Phase three was the period of deepening the reform and accelerating the development from 1992 till now. In 1993, the State Council issued *The Decision of Speeding up the Development of Tertiary Industry*. It clearly categorised Radio and TV as an important part of tertiary industry. In 1999, the State Council issued the 82nd document, which clarified the nature of radio and television as an industry, and proposed a strategy of building Radio and TV Group for each province. In addition, the central government cut off nearly all the financial provisions and pushed Radio and Television to step into the market.

The reform of Radio and TV system has been proceeding within an important context----the Chinese Open Reform began in 1978, which is mainly about the shift from a socialist planned economy system to a socialist market economy system. As Zhu Hong, dean of SARFT general office, says, 'the market is playing an increasingly important role in the allocation of resources in all areas of national economy and social undertakings... Radio Film and TV cannot be outside the socialist market economy system' (2005:54). It suggests the acknowledgment of the dual nature of media----its political attribute and economic attribute. The former refers to its ideological function as an institution under the leadership of CPC, emphasising social effects. The later refers to its function as an industrial entity, with the law of the neoliberal market as its driving force, pursuing economic benefits. Thus, Radio and TV need to continue to bear their ideological function, at the same time discovering their industrial features and functions, and becoming self-sustaining with independent operations.

The 16th CPC National Congress in 2002 explicitly proposed the reform of the cultural market to develop the socialist cultural industry. Radio and Television were listed as an important component of cultural industry, and asked to transform into so-called 'creative cultural industry sector'. It demands that Radio and TV should comply with the requirements of the socialist market economy, meanwhile, meeting the requirements of the construction of socialist spiritual civilisation, responsible for both the social and economic benefits. However, as neoliberalism conflicts with socialism, SARFT itself is facing an ideological contradiction and discomfort. It oscillates between promoting neoliberal logic, market order and protecting socialist ideology and state sovereignty. (Chapter 3)

Chinese Radio and TV is state-owned media with its party-government management model. SARFT is the highest media administrative institution of the central government, which is directly under the State Council.²¹ The aim of this management model, which has a high political dependence, is to ensure that broadcasting functions as the ideological

²¹ Provincial and municipal Radio, Film and TV administrative institutions are established by provinces and cities, which are also under the leadership of its same level CPC committees and governments.

apparatus of CPC. In addition, this era has seen an unprecedented influx of global products, theories and ideologies, RTV for instance. With globalisation as the new context, how should we safeguard CPC's ideology, provide public services, and maintain social stability, this is the focus of work of SARFT.

The Homogeneous CRTV and Competitive Provincial Satellite TV Channels

In China, there are four municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing), five autonomous ethnic minority regions (Uygur ethnic group, Mongolian ethnic group, Hui ethnic group, Tibetan ethnic group and Zhuang ethnic group), two Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macao), and in total 23 provinces including Taiwan. Since 1990s, all provinces have respectively set up their own satellite TV channels, which break through the limitation of the transmission of terrestrial television. Broadcasting television programmes via satellite, it suddenly changes the relationship between different provincial satellite TV channels and results in the fierce competition of television market nationwide.

Meanwhile, nationwide covering is an important factor that needs to be taken into account. In the Chinese television market, as well as China Central Television (CCTV), the provincial satellite television channels have the widest national coverage with their satellite transmissions. According to the survey of China Mainland Media Research Company, in 2007, Shandong satellite TV, Zhejiang satellite TV, Anhui satellite TV, Hunan satellite TV and Sichuan satellite TV ranked as Top Five in 39 provincial satellite TV channels in regards to their coverage. It ensured that over 0.7 billion national audiences could receive their television signal and programmes²². In 2011, Zhejiang satellite TV, Jiangsu satellite TV and Shandong satellite TV ranked Top Three with the national coverage exceed 0.9 billion. Shanghai Dragon TV, Sichuan satellite TV, Hunan satellite TV and Anhui satellite TV are following these three with the national covering exceeding 0.8 billion population²³. The competition between provincial satellite TV channels is intense because they all have a nationwide transmission platform. Under the pressure of marketing competition, those provincial satellite television channels are often found leading the trend of transplanting reality programmes.

The programmes of provincial satellite TV channels generally comprise news, entertainment programmes and drama series. With sufficient capital and wide coverage as a cornerstone, those powerful satellite TV channels tend to organise nation-wide talent shows, dating shows which will attract nationwide audiences to participate, watch, and engage in interactive activities such as voting. The nationwide audiences become the free labor pool. Getting the most possible participants in the show is also an approach to win publicity, ratings, and market share. For instance, talent shows usually set up regional competition areas in different cities. The shows in different provinces can be broadcast live to reach the nationwide audiences via the satellite transmission, which is beyond the

²² CMMR (2007) *2007 Provincial satellite TV Covering Report* [online] available from <http://media.cmmr.com.cn/pdf/news_0035.pdf>[22 August 2012]

²³ CMMR (2011) *2011 Provincial satellite TV Covering Report* [online] available from <http://media.cmmr.com.cn/pdf/news_0067.pdf>[22 August 2012]

limitation of administrative divisions. Cross-provinces transmission enormously expands the coverage of the show. As Ouyang Changlin, president of Hunan TV, says, 'if Hunan TV didn't timely broadcast *Super Girl* via satellite transmission and invested considerable resources and production inputs to jointly open up the national market with Tianyu Media Company, we both wouldn't gain the achievement that we have today' (2006:5). However, amongst all the provincial satellite channels, the similar strategy adopted to pursue the same national market results in lots of homogeneous reality programmes. For instance, almost each provincial satellite TV channel has its own talent show and dating show, similar format with different names.²⁴ Besides, RTV itself is a mature global franchised television format, which is also responsible for its homogeneous nature. For example, *X Factor*, *Britain's Got Talent*, *American Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and *The Voice of America*, etc., these are all similar in one way or another with different rules and themes such as dancing, singing. Likewise, *Take Me Out* has different versions in different countries around the world.

Because of the situation discussed above, CRTV examined in this thesis are all chosen from satellite television channels which possess high covering, such as Hunan TV, Zhejiang TV, Jiangsu TV, Shanghai Dragon TV and Guangdong TV, representative programmes including *Survival Challenge*, (game show, Chinese version of *Survivor*), *Super Girl* (talent show, Chinese version of *Pop Idol*), *If You Are the One* (dating show, Chinese version of *Take Me Out*) and *TEP* (social experiment show, Chinese version of *Living with the Amish*, *Amish in the City*), etc.

Conclusion

This chapter walks through the political, social and cultural context of post-Mao China for this study. Particularly the urban-rural divide, socialist values and media cultural market reform. The next chapter will review literature that presents the theoretical frame of this study.

²⁴ Due to lacking sufficient funds as well as the covering, the local provincial and municipal channels have to try different strategy, get close to the daily life of local people and rely on the local culture, which would offer the local audiences a sense of geographical, psychological and language proximity. CRTV such as *Old Uncle*, *Trading Space* are all products under this strategy of market segmentation.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter is important in shaping the development of the arguments of this study. It is divided into three main sections according to the themes: a) Neoliberalism and Socialism; b) Hegemony and ideological fantasy; c) Western RTV and neoliberal ideology.

Neoliberalism and Socialism

In this section, I briefly review neoliberalism's origins and growth as a political and economic movement, which is against socialism and collectivism. Then outline the neoliberal economy and its ideology in post-Mao China by reviewing the works of Harvey and Aihwa Ong, amongst others. Finally, I will explain the threat that the globalised neoliberal market poses to the nation state by reviewing the work of Bourdieu. The CRTV market is precisely part of the globalised RTV market, opened in the process of the cultural market reform.

Origins and Four Main Strands

The idea of neoliberalism was originally born at the 'Colloque Walter Lippmann' in Paris in 1938, a conference aimed to construct a new liberalism as a rejection of collectivism, socialism and laissez-faire liberalism (Dieter Plehwe 2009:13). In 1947, the intensive discussion continued at another conference, organized by Friedrich Hayek in Vevey, Switzerland, which aimed to combat the state ascendancy and Marxist or Keynesian planning that was becoming a visible power in the world.²⁵

According to Ray Kiely (2013)²⁶, there are four main strands to neoliberal ideas. What they have in common is that they all value what they call an 'organic market', which is seen as free but with a good order in a proper legal environment:

a) **Austrian School** is critical of socialism, state planning, and totalitarianism. The Austrian School stresses the subjective choices of individuals, which they believe to underlie all economic phenomena, highlights how to distribute resources effectively in an economy and emphasises the organising power of markets. As its leading figures Mises and Hayek stated, the information reflected in market prices leads to socially optimal allocation of resources.

b) Ordo liberals of the **Freiburg School**. It is against welfareism and advocates that individuals should be entrepreneurs. It is also anti-monopoly and advocates a healthy level of legal competition which should be regulated and maintained by the state. Ordoliberal theorists believe that the state should form an economic order instead of directing economic processes, to avoid Nazism, Keynesianism, and Russian socialism.

²⁵ The conference resulted in the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, which aims to facilitate an exchange of ideas between like-minded scholars.

²⁶ A workshop '*Neoliberalism as Policy, Theory and Practice*'. held 6-7 June 2013 at Manchester Metropolitan University. Ray Kiely is a professor at Queen Mary University, London.

c) **The Chicago School** is critical of inflation caused by governments. The School can be generally characterised by 'an uncompromising belief in the usefulness and insight of neoclassical price theory, and a normative position that favors and promotes economic liberalism and free markets' (Bruce E. Kaufman 2010:133).

d) Public choice theory, formulated in the 1950s and 60s, proposes that the state officials are rational self-interested individuals not public interest servants. It can be applied to analyse the newly formed manager echelon in post-Mao era of China. As discussed in the previous chapter, the manager group is in the privileged position to allocate resources, make decisions and obtain economic gain. They are in charge of providing numerous special market privileges. The situation proposes that government agents are becoming self-interested market participants. By mobilising resources and privileges, it is easy for them to partake in the resulting monopoly. This leads to the restoration of in-power capitalist in and out of CPC.

In summary, neoliberalism emphasises an 'organic market', competitive individualism, entrepreneurship and conflicts with the socialist idea of egalitarianism, collectivism and social welfare.

Neoliberal Economy in post-Mao China

As discussed in the previous chapter, Harvey (2005) speaking from a Marxist perspective, has outlined the reconstitution of class power in current China. He highlights the manager group as the restored capitalists and the peasant, factory workers, unemployed workers as the reconstituted working class. He also elaborates how 'a combination of corruption, hidden ruses, and overt appropriation of rights and assets that were once held in common' (ibid: 145) causes the super rich of the manager group. He comments, 'in so far as neoliberalism requires a large, easily exploited, and relatively powerless Labour force, then China certainly qualifies as a neoliberal economy, albeit 'with Chinese characteristics''(ibid: 144).

Aihwa Ong, in her book, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (2006), demonstrates how the market and policy driven strategies of spacial fragmentation in Mainland China creates the special administered market zones within its socialist economy, as an exception to the usual practices of governing. The implication of neoliberalism as exception is that it allows the state to practice its sovereignty and governance flexibly, and puts only these special zones and their peoples under the control of neoliberal logic in order to fully interact with the global market. Alternatives to neoliberalism, on the other hand, imply that certain groups, areas or departments are excluded from the neoliberal logic, aiming to protect interests of some groups or retreat from protecting some other groups. 'Low-skill citizens and migrants become exceptions to neoliberal mechanisms and are constructed as excludable populations in transit, shuttled in and out of zones of growth' (ibid: 16).

Ong's argument is different to Harvey's Marxist critical engagement with the neoliberal

economy in China. For her, neoliberalism is an malleable technology of governing in East and Southeast Asian states and is 'reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality', thus, 'governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions'(ibid:3). Certainly, Ong's applying of Foucault's concept of governmentality allows her to sidestep the discussion of ideology. Therefore, She does not look at the Chinese government as facing an ideological contradiction between the old, legitimate socialism and the new, legitimisation-needed neoliberalism, as the latest form of capitalism. In fact, the introduction of neoliberal market in China can be read as the endeavor of the central government to overcome its legitimacy crisis (Wang Hui 2001) or finish building the foundations of socialist economy (Lenin 1922) by performing economic reform, which aims to provide well for all its citizens. However, as Wang clearly identifies, 'when the state advances the market reform and social change, the political legacy of socialist ideology and governance conflicts with the ideology and practices of neoliberalism, therefore, it is creating a legitimacy crisis of the state from different angles' (2001:14). People can question the legitimacy of state's socialist governance by siding with the state-led market economy, whilst on the other hand people can question the legitimacy of the national economic policy by flying the flag of socialist ideology.

Besides, the neoliberal market reform has engendered social conflicts, as well as 'the myriad arenas of resistance that have been its byproduct at every stage' (Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden 2003:1). In the 2004, Hu Jintao administration publicly admitted that the level of social unrest had reached the red warning line. The disadvantaged social groups, such as the peasants, the unemployed workers, young people on deprived estates, are disappointed with the state, because 'the state has withdrawn, is withdrawing, from a number of sectors of social life for which it was previously responsible: social housing, public service broadcasting, schools, hospitals, etc.'(Bourdieu 1998a: 2). Thus, social unrest, rifts, antagonisms, petitions and materialistic behavior in the Chinese context, as also reflected in CRTV, actually indicates a reaction to 'the failure of the state as the guardian of the public interest' (ibid). With this in mind, I argue that *Super Girl* in 2005 functions as a channel for the masses to express their resistance (Chapter 3). The case study of *TEP* closely relates to how the ideological contradiction is handled in the programme (Chapter 5, 6).

The neoliberal ideology, as Bourdieu states, 'is based on a kind of social Neo-Darwinism: it is 'the brightest and the best', as they say at Harvard, who come out on top' (ibid: 42). The imposition of this belief leads to the cult of the 'winner', and 'establishes the struggle of all against all and cynicism as the norm of all practices' (ibid: 102). Therefore, amongst people, there is a fear provoked by the threat of other rivals. It pushes people to have to constantly learn the new skills, accept the new missions, and makes them docile due to 'insecure employment and the permanent threat of unemployment' (ibid: 98). Moreover, the failure or the unpleasant situation of disadvantaged groups is treated as induced by the fact that they are not good enough. It is, therefore, their own fault and has nothing to do with the state's social responsibility. They are asked to get stronger, better and more

capable according to the requirements. In general, people are moulded mentally and physically by different missions and projects, to become a malleable, flexible labour force, which is reflected in Western RTV such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, etc. (Andrejevic 2004; Bratich 2006; Couldry 2008). As Margaret Thatcher stated, 'economics are the method: the object is to change the soul'.²⁷ It is a deliberate strategy of inequality and demoralisation. With the term 'flexibility', 'flexible working', it suggests 'the night work, weekend work, irregular working hours, things which have always been part of the employers' dream. In a general way, neo-liberalism is a very smart and very modern repackaging of the oldest ideas of the oldest capitalists' (Bourdieu 1998a: 34). It is a restoration of an unfettered but rationalised capitalism. However, this restoration was presented by Thatcher and Reagan as a revolution.

Neoliberalism is not a spontaneous generation; it results from a continuing, lasting campaign of the intellectual powers. It becomes a hegemonic social and cultural project, as well as a political project. Hall's work on Thatcherism precisely clarifies how the intellectuals, journalists, and businessmen constantly manufacture the new hegemony, impose it as a self-evident view, and rally popular support around the project. Also, Wang (2001) states that the neoliberal ideology has become dominant in both thought and practice amongst the intellectuals in China. The idea of progressivism is admired in China due to its poor, backward past, and the Western modernisation is taken as the only reference. Thereby, people tend to accept that 'maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions' (Bourdieu 1998a: 30-1). Moreover, the media advocates and rationalises the neoliberal economy, meanwhile, promulgates that happiness consists in contentment for the disadvantaged groups.

Neoliberalism has its own paradoxes.²⁸ Yet, it is believed that paradoxes and each crisis are caused by insufficient liberalisation. Each crisis is taken as temporary, which will be solved in the future with a sufficient liberalisation (Philip Mirowski 2009) and market friendly intervention. Similarly, the Chinese government uses the myth of 'development and transition' to explain and rationalise social disharmony. However, as indicated by the increasing social rifts, anger and antagonisms, the legitimacy of neoliberal market economy has become a hegemonic project in China. I argue, CRTV functions as one site for the negotiated consensus.

Neoliberalism, Globalisation and State Sovereignty

Another important issue is the threat induced by neoliberal market towards nation state and its sovereignty. Neoliberal marketisation is promoted worldwide under the veil of Globalisation. Globalisation, for Bourdieu, 'is a myth in the strong sense of the word, a

²⁷ Butt, R. (1981) 'Interview for Sunday Times'. *Sunday Times* [online] 3 May. available from <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475>> [3 May 1981]

²⁸ For example, despite the retreat of the state under the Thatcher administration in the UK, the state spending still grew, not only was there an increase in defence and law and order, but also in the welfare bill as unemployment soared.

powerful discourse, an *idée force*, an idea which has social force, which obtains belief' (1998a: 34). It represents the core of neoliberalism, aims at the free trade, proposes an economic strategy of unifying the economic field of the entire world, and tries to eliminate all the limits and obstacles, which are often set by the national states. Neoliberalism, as a market ideology, an economic doctrine, seeks to limit the scope and activity of government. It is against the concept of the welfare state and the Keynesian intervention of the state, and demands the lifting of administrative or political barriers. The neoliberal utopia and its advocates 'preach the subordination of national states to the demands of economic freedom for the masters of the economy, with the suppression of all regulations on all markets' (ibid: 101), which includes privatisation of public services and the reduction of public and welfare spending. Thus, Bourdieu asserted that 'the critical efforts of intellectuals, trade unions or associations should be applied as a matter of priority against the withering away of the state' (ibid: 40-1). It says that state should insist on the holding of its sovereignty, to fight against the threat of the neoliberal ideas.

In the present day, the globalization of neoliberalism is doing everything to expand the world market.²⁹ With the goal of an optimal allocation of global resources, it tears up the boundaries of nation states, forces every nation and state to step into the world economic system. It aims to weaken the nation state's sovereignty and make it no longer the unit for the development of capitalism. Instead, transnational corporations become the new global economic units. 'Globalization', as Bourdieu wrote,

Embodies the most accomplished form of the imperialism of the universal...Globalisation is instituted both as inevitable destiny and as political project of universal liberation, as the end-point of a natural evolution and as the civic and ethical ideal that promise political emancipation for the people of all countries, in the name of a postulated connection between democracy and the market. (2003:86)

Similarly, Žižek also comments that globalisation represents 'the brutal imposition of the unified world market that threatens all local ethnic traditions, including the very form of the

²⁹ Marx had depicted an economic globalisation in *The Communist Manifesto*, 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations' (1970:35-6). For Marx and Engels, it is the expanding of the world market makes history become world history, as they stated in *The German Ideology*, 'the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the developed mode of production and intercourse and the division of labour between various nations naturally brought forth by these, the more history becomes world history' (1998:12). However, when Marx examined the global expanding of capitalism during the era of world history, he never denied the peculiarity of the development of various nations. On the contrary, the nation state was the basic unit when Marx analysed international relations.

nation-state' (2001:12).

The neoliberal market economy has been spreading in China with not much difficulty due to the impact of progressivism and cosmopolitanism. However, its threat to the state sovereignty is under the close scrutiny. I analyse this situation and suggest that how the contradiction is dealt with can be explored through the study of CRTV, because CRTV itself represents a new television market.

Hegemony and Ideological Fantasy

In this section, I review some important concepts for this study, especially the Gramsci's concept and analysis of hegemony, Zizek's definition of ideology 'in itself', 'for itself', 'in-and-for itself' (1994a:8-14), and most importantly, ideological fantasy and its function in contemporary society, in which cynicism is pervasive. Cynicism, as a form of ideology, has developed globally with the dominance of neoliberal ideas. Whilst Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as a practical strategy, is helpful for understanding how 'ideology in-itself' operates at the level of consciousness and reason, Zizek with his concept of ideological fantasy clarifies how 'ideology in-and-for' itself operates at the level of the unconscious, which is the secret of the formation of cynicism.

Within the framework of Zizek's theory, I also review some other Marxist, post-Marxist theorists such as Hall, Laclau and Mouffe. Doing so, I try to show my understanding of the development of concepts such as ideology, hegemony, as well as British cultural studies' attention to popular culture. Additionally, it is important to explain how the concepts connect to CRTV produced in the climate of market-driven Chinese society. It provides the theoretical framework for the discussions in each chapter and demonstrates the use of the Western theory in the Chinese context.

Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as 'Ideology for Itself'

The materiality, the externalisation's of ideology is what Zizek refers to as 'ideology for-itself', which is 'epitomised by the Althusserian notion of ISA that designate the material existence of ideology in ideological practices, rituals and institutions' (1994a:12). The nature of this 'ideology for-itself' is, 'kneel down and *you shall believe that you knelt down because of your belief* -- that is, your following the ritual is an expression/effect of your inner belief; in short, the 'external' ritual performatively generates its own ideological foundation'(ibid).

ISA's are there to interpellate individuals to internalise the dominant ideology. However, Zizek says that the ideological interpellation of ISA cannot be fully internalised by a subjects. There is a constitutive gap between 'machine' and its 'internalisation' (1989:42-3).³⁰ For him, the subject is 'the original void, the lack of symbolic structure' (ibid:175), which exists even before the effect of subjectivation. Additionally, in the context of a socialist country introducing the market economy, the ISAs would find themselves

³⁰ Althusser also came to the same conclusion and turned to Lacan's work to deal with this, see his essay 'Freud and Lacan'.

confronted by ideological contradictions, which make the role of interpellation more intricate. For this study, SARFT, as the highest media administrative institution in China, is directly under the leadership of CPC, which makes it a party-state apparatus. The situation of its shifting between following the doctrine of market (capitalist ideology) and safeguarding the reproduction of socialist ideology can be explored through its regulation on CCTV (Chapter 3).

Gramsci and Hegemony

Gramsci understood the relevant role of ideology and the state, but offered a more comprehensive insight into popular culture by seeing it as not colluding with the state or with dominant values. RTV, without doubt, is a current hit form of popular culture. It is a possible site for hegemonic struggle.

Gramsci saw ideology as a site of particularly vigorous contestation, and the popular culture as a source of considerable resistance to hegemonic formation, 'popular culture is the battleground upon which dominant views secure hegemony; further, it is a permanent battleground' (Turner 1990:211). For Gramsci, it is the sphere of class struggles and of popular-democratic struggles which arise out of the different ways in which people are grouped together----by sex, race, generation, local community, region, nation and so on. Thus, it is the sphere in which a dominant group organises consent and cultural hegemony. It is also the sphere where the subordinate groups may organise their opposition and construct an alternative hegemony----counter-hegemony.

Gramsci saw hegemony as a relation between classes and other social forces. 'A hegemonic class, or part of a class, is one which gains the consent of other classes and social forces through creating and maintaining a system of alliances by means of political and ideological struggle'(Simon 1982:23). As Hall explained,

[An ideological hegemony] constructed by harnessing the lines of force and opinion in the apparently 'free space' of civil society has a remarkable durability, depth, and staying power because the adhesion it wins among the people is not coerced, as it might be if the state were directly involved, but appears to be produced freely and spontaneously as the popular consent to power. (1988b:48)

Hall says that domination cannot be achieved by manipulating the world view of the masses; rather, the cultural leadership has to be won by engaging in negotiations with opposing groups, classes, and values, which must result in some genuine accommodation.

In this sense, Halls analysis of Thatcherism is also useful to look at as a reference, given that Chinese reform programme embarked on by Deng Xiaoping since 1978 has been following the same path as advanced by Thatcher and Reagan (Harvey 2005). The most novel aspect of Thatcherism is the very way in which it stitches up or unifies the

contradictory strands in its discourse, 'the resonant themes of organic Toryism----nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism, patriarchy----with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism----self interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism' (Hall 1988a: 157). Likewise, reflected in the discursive space of CRTV is that CPC in its ascendancy tries to maintain the legitimacy of both socialism and neoliberalism in the Chinese context. It is the expression of the values achieved through hegemonic struggle.

Hall and Thatcherism

Thatcherism stitches up Toryism and neoliberalism. The striking feature of it is precisely its capacity 'to use the trenches and fortifications of civil society as the means of forging a considerable ideological and intellectual authority outside the realm of the state proper' (ibid: 47). According to Hall, the Thatcherites had to engage in an ideological struggle, to contest the opposition in and out of their own party, 'they had to dismantle the particular sort of social-democratic consensus that had been in place since the war. They had to unpack the commitment to the welfare state and unravel a whole field of ideology that people had come to take as perfectly obvious and unquestionable' (1988b: 61). The new consensus, i.e. a neoliberal market approach and welfare-cuts, was gradually constructed, while the old one was dismantled. In this, Hall and O'Shea foregrounded the ideological role of common sense, the power of the taken-for-granted. As they argued,

Margaret Thatcher re-validated the meaning of 'fairness' by a common sense appeal to 'what we all already think': 'A great number of people in Britain are becoming increasingly alarmed about a society which depends on the state's help-on entitlement.You can't have welfare before someone else has created national wealth.'

(2013:14)

It is the re-expression of authority's will under the veil of common sense. Herein, Hall and O'Shea insist that the Left must take the struggle over common sense seriously to fight against neoliberal common sense. But their approach is still the struggle at conscious level. The struggle at unconscious level has not been considered.

Additionally, Hall observed the role of media in the course of manufacturing consensus. He contended that the media not only reflects a consensus but also shapes it. The media institutions in the UK, as he explained, are generally thought to be free of direct compulsion and constraint, but comply with dominant definitions, 'the media become part and parcel of that dialectical process of the 'production of consent'----shaping the consensus while reflecting it----which orientates them within the field of force of the dominant social interests represented within the state' (1982:87). This process, as Turner notes, 'affects both state-owned and commercial media institutions. ...The role of the media in constructing consent is not to be understood in terms of any 'bias' or deliberate 'distortion' in its representation of events' (1990:209). CRTV, under the regulation of SARFT, should also shape the consensus while reflecting it. Additionally, if neoliberalism, as a form of discourse, operates under the veil of common sense (Couldry 2008), then, socialism also needs to operate in the name of common sense, which is different to the

common sense of capitalism. If the Western RTV becomes a theatre for the performance of neoliberalism, because capitalism is the only game in town, then, Chinese RTV offers a space for a discursive articulatory practice to ideologically solve the contradiction between urban and rural, neoliberalism and socialism. Discourse is always imbued with power. This is the ideology operating at the level of consciousness and reason. Therefore, discourse analysis is very pertinent for criticising 'ideology in-itself', which functions as non-ideological, looks like that facts speak for themselves.

Discourse, Master Signifier and Hegemonic struggle

'Ideology in-itself', for Žižek, is 'destined to convince us of its 'truth', yet actually serving some unavowed particular power interest'(1994a:9). Discourse analysis, therefore, aims to elaborate the ideological of this apparent non-ideological discourse, reveal the discursive mechanisms of this seeming non-ideological discourse, expose the naturalisation of the symbolic order, and explain how we misperceive a discursive formation as an extra-discursive fact.³¹ There is no such complex set of ideas which is 'unbiased by any discursive devices or conjunctions with power...facts *never* 'speak for themselves' but are always *made to speak* by a network of discursive devices' (ibid: 9-1). Therefore, when prejudiced urban people says, 'there are too many migrant peasants on our streets!', he actually sees this 'against the background of a discursively pre-constructed space'(ibid:11). In other words, there is a symbolic universe determine beforehand this urban people's opinion, which sees city and its people as modern, superb, sees country and its people as underdeveloped and underclass. It is a consciousness of class stratification, which proves the reconstituted class power in post-Mao China.

As Laclau argued, 'meaning does not inhere in elements of an ideology as such ----these elements, rather, function as 'free floating signifiers' whose meaning is fixed by the mode of their hegemonic articulation'(ibid). According to Žižek, the process of fixing meaning includes two steps. Firstly, it is the suture conducted by master signifier, or in Lacan's word, nodal point, 'the multitude of 'floating signifiers', of proto-ideological elements, is structured into an unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning' (Žižek 1989:95). In the Chinese context, urbanisation and its economy is sutured by neoliberalism, whilst rural morality is sutured by another master signifier - socialism. Thus, countryside becomes the birth place of socialist 'original culture' (Bhabha: 1994) (Chapter 5). The master signifier fixes the floating of other signifiers, designates their meanings, structures them as an unified field, and gives them ideological significance in the discourse. Secondly, which discourse will succeed in 'appropriating' one concept (signifier) depends on the fight of discursive hegemony. Therefore, city, country, urbanisation, rural morality are all signifiers engaged in the fight of within a discursive hegemony between

³¹ Habermas is exactly trapped in this discursive mechanism by advocating his theory of communicative rationality. He tries to replace instrumental rationality with communicative rationality, seeks a potential structure of communicative rationality to replace the one that is systematically distorted by power. However, 'what Habermas perceives as the step out of ideology is denounced here as ideology *par excellence*' (Žižek 1994a:9).

socialism and neoliberalism. For the Chinese government, the city is expected to be economically neoliberal and morally sound, whilst country should be historically communist but also modernised, i.e. urbanised. The plan of constructing a 'new socialist countryside', urbanisation, expansion, and political correctness of discourse as related to agriculture, rural areas and peasants (see Chapter 1) could all be seen as an effort of the government. The effort is also reflected in the discursive formation of CRTV, which is the process of finding an equilibrium between neoliberalism and socialism. As Gramsci argued, 'often, ideological shifts take place, not by substituting one, whole, new conception of the world for another, but by presenting a novel combination of old and new elements----a process of distinction and of change in the relative weight possessed by the elements of the old ideology' (quoted in Hall 1988a: 158). Therefore, I start from analysing CRTVs representation, as ideology in-itself, and how it changes according to different responding discourses from different positions, to examine the negotiating process of fixing meaning about city and country, to observe the hegemonic consensus.

However, hegemony, consensus, common sense, these concepts indicate how ideology operates at the level of consciousness and reason, but not how it operates at the level of the unconscious. For Žižek, capitalist ideology nowadays is not anymore an ideology in-itself, or ideology for-itself, it is 'the 'spontaneous' ideology at work at the heart of social 'reality' itself' (1994a:8), i.e. an ideology in-and-for itself, which credits to an 'overlooked, unconscious illusion' of commodity, money and capital, defined by Žižek as 'ideological fantasy' (1989:30). Herein people submit to the neoliberal market with a cynical attitude, 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it' (ibid). Cynicism reflects how market ideology operates at the level of the unconscious. So, is socialist ideology also an ideology in-and-for itself? If so, then what is the ideological fantasy of socialist ideology in the Chinese context? By applying Žižek's theory to my case study of *TEP*, I not only examine consensus and common sense, but also trace an unconscious, implicit, pre-comprehension of the signifier 'countryside' in post-Mao China, which infiltrates into people's practice. It is an ideological fantasy that people secretly believe or see as common sense.

Commodity Fetishism as 'Ideology in-and-for Itself' and Cynicism

For Žižek, ideology in the present day is 'a For-itself of ideology at work in the very In-itself of extra-ideological actuality' (1994a:14). It is more secret, more difficult to be conscious about,

Neither ideology *qua* explicit doctrine, articulated convictions on the nature of man, society and the universe, nor ideology in its material existence (institutions, rituals and practices that give body to it), but the elusive network of implicit, quasi-'spontaneous' presuppositions and attitudes that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of 'non-ideological' (economic, legal, political, sexual . . .) practices. (ibid)

Commodity fetishism, as 'an uncanny chimera at work in the very heart of the actual

process of social production' (ibid: 29), is precisely this kind of ideology. In theory, people understand that value in itself does not exist, however, in the practice of exchange, 'he acts as if the particular things (the commodities) were just so many embodiments of universal Value' (Zizek 1989:29). It is the inversion of the particular and the universal. Therefore, Zizek asserts that capitalist ideology functions at the level of 'doing', rather than 'knowing'. Ideology produces itself in the practice of exchange. It is not a naive consciousness anymore, rather, it is an enlightened 'false consciousness': 'one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it' (ibid: 26). What one pursues is precisely the hidden, particular interest, 'I know, but nevertheless...'

Herein we see the emergence of cynicism, as Zizek says,

With a disarming frankness one 'admits everything', yet this full acknowledgement of our power interests does not in any way prevent us from pursuing these interests----the formula of cynicism is no longer the classic Marxian 'they do not know it, but they are doing it'; it is 'they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it'. (1994a:7)

Thus, Zizek more concerns about why and how it is happening----the operation of ideology, rather than its falsity or truth. He contends that cynicism is caused by the fact that one is guided by an illusion in the exchange practice. People 'are fetishists in practice, not in theory. What they 'do not know', what they misrecognise, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity----in the act of commodity exchange----they are guided by the fetishistic illusion' (Zizek 1989:30), a fetishistic inversion of the exchange value and the use value, the particular and the universal. This unconscious, overlooked illusion, Zizek calls, ideological fantasy.

In this sense, the place of illusion is in the reality of doing itself, on the side of behavior. Because, 'if the illusion were on the side of knowledge, then the cynical position would really be a post-ideological position, simply a position without illusions' (ibid). However, Zizek asserts that we are far from being a post-ideological society. In fact, his theory of ideological criticism successfully and directly argues against the discourse of the end of ideology, the end of history (Bell 1960; Fukuyama 1989,1992; Huntington 1996), which claims that, after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the Western democratic system has seized the victory, and it is the end of the worldwide ideological struggle and the end of history.

Back to the Class Struggle

The same critical attitude towards the 'end of ideology' is shared by Jacques Derrida. As Derrida comments, the idea of the end of history 'exhibits it as the finest ideological showcase of victorious capitalism'(1994:56). It says that the 'end of ideology' itself is the strongest ideology. It refuses to criticize capitalism as a whole system. It formulates an excuse to escape from criticism. It is exactly in the era of capitalism untouchable, those

struggles, which are not necessarily against capitalism, such as racial, ethnic, feminist struggle have gained a strong vitality. It is the age of single issue politics. This is also why Laclau and Mouffe flag their theory of a radical plural democracy, and sum up this political project as a struggle carried out by a plural subject, replacing the struggle for socialism carried out by a unified subject, the working class³². As Ellen Meiksins Wood criticizes,

Therefore, a democratic impulse and a plurality of 'democratic struggle' replace material interests and class struggle as the moving force of history, while socialist demands are merely 'a moment internal to the democratic revolution'. 'Democratic discourse', then, is the unifying thread of history and politics, and the cement that loosely binds together the disparate elements of the plural subject. (1998:64)

The claim of Laclau and Mouffe is to transform the revolution into an uninterrupted continuous process in which, democracy changes its form from a capitalist one to a socialist one.³³ Unlike them take class struggle as being 'just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live' (Butler, Laclau, and Zizek 2000:203), Zizek argues that the very proliferation of new political subjectivities, 'which seems to relegate 'class struggle' to a secondary role, is the result of the 'class struggle' in the context of today's global capitalism, of the advance of so-called 'post-industrial' society' (ibid: 320). Therefore, Zizek finally changes and distinguishes himself from Laclau and Butler, and criticizes their theories as being still limited by the frame of capitalist freedom-democracy, which reflects 'the acceptance of capitalism as 'the only game in town', the renunciation of any real attempt overcome the existing capitalist liberal regime' (ibid: 95), thus, not radical at all.

Zizek, therefore, advocates----back to the class struggle. Zizek asserts that class struggle is a general illumination that secretly overdetermines the very horizon of the series of struggles (economic, political, feminist, ecological, ethnic, etc.). In his book, *For They Know not What They Do*, Zizek also critiques his thought at an earlier stage when he was siding with Laclau and Mouffe's theory of radical plural democracy, '*The Sublime Object* oscillates between Marxism proper and praise of 'pure' democracy' (2002:xviii). Therefore, he finally comments on their theory. In fact, since the publication of *The Ticklish Subject*

³² Laclau and Mouffe try to break the ontological centrality of the working class, 'undermine the very foundations of the Marxist view that the working class will be agent of socialist transformation, and to replace it with a political project whose object is 'radical democracy' and whose subject is a popular alliance constituted not by relations of class, nor indeed by any determinate social relations, but rather by discourse' (Wood 1998:54).

³³ They think, 'in a modern democracy must accept division and conflict as unavoidable, and the reconciliation of rival claims and conflicting interests can only be partial and provisional' (Mouffe 1993:113). It signifies the dynamic process of manufacturing consent. Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe call for back to the hegemonic struggle as a strategy to achieve this radical plural democracy, which can be characterised by its uncertainty, thus, it embraces diversity and differences, contains a variety of inconsistent different opinions, antagonisms and conflicts.

in 1999, Žižek has already announced that he still holds the traditional belief in Marxism. He becomes even more radical by siding with Leninism.

Renewed Class Power in post-Mao China

We need to understand that Žižek's motto 'back to the class struggle' is raised in the Western capitalist context. In the Chinese context, on the other hand, it is said that the Chinese working class has achieved its historical mission by defeating the capitalists and establishing a new socialist state. It has been promulgated by the central government that class struggle, between Chinese people as the proletariat and the capitalists as the enemy, is no longer the major problem. Mao once claimed that the main problem in the new China should be the contradictions amongst Chinese people, i.e. internal affairs. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, introducing market economy results in the urban-rural divide, the increasing inequality and economic disparity within both the urban and the rural sectors. Therefore, Harvey (2005) contends that this is the reconstitution of class struggle. In other words, class antagonism renews but takes new forms, i.e. antagonism between urban and rural, rich and poor, the Han majority and other minority ethnic groups.

The problem is that the party would not want to admit that it is the antagonism between classes, which indicates a renewed class struggle and ultimately the necessity of another radical revolution. What CPC wants is the solidarity of its ruled people. In this sense, it is important to construct a people's alliance unified by consensus and collective will. At this moment, the term 'zhonghua minzu', translated as 'Chinese nation', was resurrected to include all Chinese (urban dwellers, rural farmers, men, women, youth), the mainstream Han-Chinese and other 55 ethnic groups as a huge Chinese family (Landis and Albert 2012; Zhao 2000; Lawrance 2004). This can be seen as an effort to form a people's alliance. Besides, unity is created based on the common goal of developing modernisation. Participating in modernisation is becoming Chinese peoples' political mission and public affair. Hegemony requires the unification of various social forces into a broad alliance expressing the national-popular collective will of developing modernisation, and each of these forces should make its own contribution to the advance towards modernisation and urbanisation in post-Mao China. CRTV is offering the discursive space for the negotiation of different discourses to reaffirm the goal, the future, and the dream.

Besides, in order to construct a harmonious society and a people's alliance, rural people cannot be refused or ejected in the way the Jews were treated under Fascism/Nazism, in which, Jews were seen to be responsible for the whole social crisis including economic crisis and political crisis. The social structural antagonism was transformed and replaced by the racial difference. Therefore, Nazis chose to eliminate Jews. The fact is that it is contingent for Jews being picked up to play the role of being 'Jew' and take the blame (Žižek 1993). It is not because Jews are cunning or financially exploit the rest of the population, or seduce innocent young daughters, etc., it is just because they are Jews, 'the anti-Semitic idea of Jew has nothing to do with Jews; the ideological figure of a Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system' (Žižek 1989:49). It is an ideological fantasy constructing the reality. In a sense, class struggle can also be

interpreted as an ideological fantasy to clarify the social structural antagonism. As Žižek explains, 'there is no class struggle 'in reality': 'class struggle' designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole' (1994a:21). For Žižek, Marx used the term 'class struggle' to re-explain the constitutive antagonism, which exists since feudal society. On the other hand, this very antagonism is the spectre of the Real and revealed by class struggle.

In the Chinese context, the constitutive antagonism has taken the form of rich-poor antagonism, urban-rural antagonism. However, the party can neither exclude rural people, or borrow the concept of class struggle, a different ideological fantasy, therefore, is needed to transform the social divide into a new level of equilibrium, a sutured totality. It is the situation from where the ideological figure of countryside gets my attention, and it is the reason of my examining of *TEP*, as it is a popular show today, with urban-rural divide as its backdrop. In order to understand the ideological figure of countryside, it is important to understand the function of ideological fantasy and how it operates.

The Function of Ideological Fantasy

For Žižek, it is the ideological fantasy constructing social reality and the subject. He points out that class antagonism is precisely the Lacanian Real. He states, 'society is 'held together' by the very antagonism, splitting, that forever prevents its closure in a harmonious, transparent, rational Whole---by the very impediment that undermines every rational totalisation' (1994a:22). Antagonism is the part which is repressed and is not integrated, domesticated by society, and makes the Other inconsistent. In this sense, the harmonious society promulgated by the central government is just Utopia.

The function of ideological fantasy is to fill the opening, the gap in the Other, serve as a screen concealing this inconsistency. Fantasy constitutes the frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful. As Žižek clarifies, 'fantasy conceals the fact that the Other, the symbolic order, is structured around some traumatic impossibility, around something which cannot be symbolised' (1989:123). Further, 'the stake of social- ideological fantasy is to construct a vision of society which does exist. A society which is not split by an antagonistic division, a society in which the relation between its parts is organic, complementary' (ibid: 126).

As argued above, Jews were picked up to be responsible for the social crisis. The constitutive antagonism was transformed into the racial difference.³⁴ It implies that the internal constitutive limit is symbolised and transformed into an external restraint or obstacle. The social crisis, then, becomes the result of the interference of an external factor. It is precisely how ideological fantasy operates---"giving body' to the impossible limit/the abyss as something forbidden' (Žižek 2004:62-4, trans. by Ji Guangmao). People understand the social reality via the frame constituted by this ideological fantasy; people believe that once they eliminate this external obstacle, the society would become a perfect

³⁴ Just as immigrants are blamed for unemployment and the lack of good wages and housing in the UK today.

one. We live in a seamless society created by ideological fantasy, which rejects the traumatic kernel, adapts the current situation and offers us a vision of society in the future.

Therefore, ideology, as Žižek argues,

In its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualised by Laclau and Mouffe as 'antagonism'³⁵: a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolised). (1989:45)

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality. It is a social existence and regulates social reality. We live it. We live in ideology.

Yet, in post-Mao China, as rural people cannot be excluded, class struggle is not admitted; a different ideological fantasy is needed. By examining *TEP*, it helps us to understand the pre-comprehension of countryside, an ideological fantasy that manifests itself through 'returning to the countryside' as a materialised belief (Chapter 5). As Žižek says, 'belief, far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always materialised in our effective social activity' (ibid: 33). Fantasy is supported by the materialised belief, 'the external custom is always a material support for the subject's unconscious' (ibid: 39). In this sense, movement such as 'Down to the Countryside Movement' in Mao era³⁶, 'returning to the countryside' in *TEP*, ideologically supporting the countryside and rural people, philanthropic activities voluntarily conducted by urban people, even constructing 'a new socialist countryside', can all be seen as the materialised belief.

The Ideological fantasy also constructs the subject. It explains, for the purpose of this thesis, how the Marxist/psychoanalytic perspective links with empirical/ethnographic audience reception work. The subject, which is the subject of the signifier for Žižek, is the original void, the lack of symbolic structure. 'The subject of the signifier is precisely this lack, this impossibility of finding a signifier which would be 'its own': the failure of its representation is its positive condition' (1989:175). This epistemological failure becomes the positive condition for ontological existence. Further, there is an 'object of fantasy', produced by ideology, which fills up the content of the subject: 'the subject is the void, the hole in the Other, and the object the inert content filling up this void; the subject's entire 'being' thus consists in the fantasy-object filling out his void' (ibid:223). This object of fantasy is precisely the 'sublime object' of ideology:

³⁵ Laclau and Mouffe state, 'the social only exists as a partial effort for constructing society----that is, an objective and closed system of differences----antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not internal but external to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself' (1985:125).

³⁶ Wikipedia (2014) *Down to the Countryside Movement*. [online] available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_to_the_Countryside_Movement>[6 October 2014]

The Sublime is no longer an (empirical) object indicating through its very inadequacy the dimension of a transcendent Thing-in-itself (Idea) but an object which occupies the place, replaces, fills out the empty place of the Thing as the void, as the pure Nothing of absolute negativity - the Sublime is an object whose positive body is just an embodiment of Nothing. (ibid: 234)

This sublime object can be articulated in Hegel in the form of the so-called 'infinite judgement', such as 'the Spirit is a bone', 'Wealth is the self', 'the State is Monarch'.

Moreover, this sublime object is the object-cause of desire, which indicates the 'object petit a'. Object petit a is 'a concept that comprises itself and its own opposite and/or dissimulation. Object a is simultaneously the pure lack, the void around which the desire turns and which, as such, causes the desire, and the imaginary element which conceals this void, renders it invisible by filling it out' (Zizek 1994b:178). Once we see the embodiment of this object petit a, our desire will be caused. It is the object petit a which ensures the coherence of our (the subject's) desire. The audience in my case, therefore, functions as an example, representing the subject, the Chinese people in their post-Mao era.

However, the problem is, as Zizek (1997) says, once the frame of fantasy collapses, the reality would collapse as well. That means, countryside in the Chinese context at this moment, has to be there and distinguished from city. The urban-rural difference has to be remained to some extent to ensure the ideological figure of countryside. So why do we need the ideological figure of countryside, or in other words, what and how does it do in a market-driven Chinese society at present days? To answer these questions, we need first understand the market as an ideology in-and-for itself.

The Market in China, Cynicism and the Socialist legacy

For Zizek, the market, 'as an extra-ideological coercion, is an ideological gesture par excellence' (1994a:14). The freedom promulgated by the market cover up the fact that the working class is not free, but forced to freely sell its labour. The apparent equal exchange in market conceals the un-equal exchange of labour, which is an unique commodity. The market does not bring emancipation. The problem is, people know that this apparent freedom conceals exploitation, yet they are still 'doing' it.

Additionally, 'the market and (mass) media are dialectically interconnected' (ibid). Firstly, the media 'structure our perception of reality in advance and render reality indistinguishable from the 'aestheticized' image of it' (ibid), thus, it is difficult for people to escape its control. Therefore, Couldry correctly states that RTV functions as a theatre for the performance of neoliberalism, in order for people to accept the values presented. RTV, such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* which simulate the competitive situation in the modern market, contributes to the construction of capitalist realism and the formation of cynicism. Actually, the cynical, 'sober' attitude towards commodity, money, market, capitalism has

gradually emerged in China as well following its market-centered economic reform since 1978. Looking at CRTV, gives a chance to observe the rising cynicism in the Chinese context (Chapter 4). Secondly, media is pushed into marketisation by the market forces, and CRTV market is part of the globalised RTV market. Television media itself is practicing the doctrine of the market, which indicates that the market is an extra-ideological coercion, hence, ideology in-and-for itself.

In China, the market coercion, as the core of neoliberalism, is against socialist collectivism and egalitarianism. So how is this contradiction dealt with? Firstly, Lenin's opinion seems to maybe offer a solution. As Zizek puts it,

‘In his wonderful short text ‘Notes of a Publicist’----written in February 1922 when the Bolsheviks, after winning the Civil War against all odds, had to retreat into the New Economic Policy of allowing a much wider scope to the market economy and private property----Lenin uses the analogy of a climber who must backtrack from his first attempt to reach a new mountain peak to describe what retreat means in a revolutionary process, and how it can be done without opportunistically betraying the cause. (2009:43)

Similarly, what CPC has been trying to do is to finish building the foundations of socialist economy, in order to avoid the hostile powers of capitalism subverting its authority. Therefore, it is not the question of ‘shall we do it or not do it’, it is ‘how to do it’. It is also, where the myth of ‘development and transition’ originates. For the central government, it is how to retain the competitive market mechanism to ensure economic development, but also get rid of its cruelty and immorality to guarantee the socialist values. Alternatively, said in a simple way, how to develop a decent capitalism with socialist characteristics----capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

The CPC has succeeded in leading a socialist revolution, and has established a socialist country. Retreating to a market economy could be seen as a strategy to finish building the foundations of socialist economy if we are following Lenin's argument. The central government has been experiencing the contradiction between the neoliberal market and socialism and the social rifts that follow. However, for social, economic and political stability, it definitely does not welcome another radical revolution. Therefore, mild reform is seen to be what is needed, along with the consent of the public of course. By picturing a ‘perfect’ urban youth, *TEP* is suturing the ideological contradiction between neoliberalism and socialism (Chapter 5), and finally maintains the legitimacy of neoliberal market in the Chinese context.

Zizek agrees that Marx had understood that the ultimate limit of capitalism is Capital itself, however, ‘Marx's fundamental mistake was to conclude, from these insights, that a new, higher social order (Communism) is possible, an order that would not only maintain but even raise to a higher degree, and effectively fully release, the potential of the self-increasing spiral of productivity’ (2001:17). For Zizek, Marx's mistake was a

misrecognition that the driving force of the development of capitalism is exactly coming from its inherent contradictions, 'this inherent obstacle/antagonism as the 'condition of impossibility' of the full deployment of productive forces is simultaneously its 'condition of possibility'...if we abolish the obstacle, the inherent contradiction of capitalism, we do not get the fully unleashed drive to productivity finally delivered of its impediment' (ibid). Therefore, Zizek states that Marxian Communism was just a perfect fantasy of the imperfect, cruel capitalism, 'the capitalist inherent transgression at its purest, a strictly ideological fantasy of maintaining the thrust towards productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the obstacles and antagonisms' (ibid: 18).

In this sense, Zizek states that 'China is today the ideal capital state: freedom for the capital, with state doing the 'dirty job' of controlling the workers. ...everything subordinated to the ruthless drive to develop and become the new superpower' (2002:146-47). However, it might be a rash conclusion. Though the cynicism is a fact, we cannot overlook the existence of the socialist legacy. I argue, the countryside fantasy suggests the persistent existence of the socialist legacy, which manifests itself as intending to regulate the cruelty and immorality of capitalism, and continues the struggle between socialism and neoliberalism at the level of the unconscious.

Can We Resist Neoliberalism?

Both Bourdieu and Zizek are fighting a war against the belief which sees the globalisation of neoliberalism as the only answer for human society. They reveal how ideological fantasy in a capitalist society manipulates the public's perception, and they expose the internal antagonisms of capitalist society. Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, as the New Left, stand up with *The Kilburn Manifesto* to challenge the neoliberal victory. As Hall insist, 'we must stubbornly defend the principles on which the welfare state was founded----redistribution, egalitarianism, collective provision, democratic accountability and participation, the right to education and healthcare----and find new ways in which they can be institutionalised and expressed' (24 April 2013).³⁷ Mark Fisher also promotes the struggle against neoliberalism and states, 'the tendency of neoliberal bureaucracy is to individualise (with the threat that, if individuals refuse to co-operate with particular bureaucratic initiatives, they will lose their job). It can only be countered by the kind of collective action which unions ought to be able to organise' (2013:92-3). It suggests again Zizek's motto, back to the class struggle, and suggests that the many types of the proletariat should be unified.

From different theoretical starting points, these theorists are heading in the same anticapitalist direction. China, as an 'actually existing socialism' (Zizek 2001:19), is also responding to its socialist legacy. This phenomenon can be studied through the examination of CRTV. This is the importance and the originality of this thesis.

³⁷ Hall, S. (2013) 'The Kilburn Manifesto: our challenge to the neoliberal victory'. *The Guardian* [online] 24 April. available from <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/24/kilburn-manifesto-challenge-neoliberal-victory>> [24 April 2013]

Western RTV and Neoliberal Ideology

In this section, I review the Western literature on RTV and locate some important concepts related to this research, particularly 'revelation', 'intervention', and 'representation', focusing on how the neoliberal ideology is manifested in Anglo-American RTV, how the government's neoliberal strategy is reflected in the Western programmed and its cultural politics. I have already said that western programmed are ideological too, but due to the different social, media, economic and political context, it is different to that we find in the Chinese context.

Revelation of the Self or the Social?

Early studies of RTV focused primarily on the definition of this new genre and its relation to other television genres. For example, Bill Nicholls (1991), John Corner (1995) and Richard Kilborn (1994) focus on positioning RTV within the domain of documentary television, and within existing academic debates about documentary studies. Stella Bruzzi emphasises the use of lightweight, portable cameras in producing observational documentaries, including the objective of dealing with current events unfolding in front of the camera (2001:130). Further, Amy West argues that handycams, low-grade audiovisual tapes endow the format 'with the apparent aesthetic of amateurism and distinguish the footage from manipulated professional television production' (2005:83), and therefore, prove authenticity. In other words, the low-grade video image produced by unprofessional cameras has become 'the privileged form of TV "truth telling"' (Dovey 2000:55). Hill summarises that RTV has a conflicting relationship particularly with observational documentary, which she clarifies emerged from 'direct cinema' in 1960s America, '*cinéma vérité*' in 1960s France, and the 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary television in 1970s Britain (2005:20). The obsession with the camera as a tool to observe clearly influenced the trend of fly-on-the-wall docu-soaps such as *The Real World* (USA, MTV, 1991--), *The Cruise* (UK, BBC, 1998), *The Family* (UK, Channel4, 2008), followed by reality game shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn make a comparison between documentary and RTV. For them, documentaries and current affairs programmed are investigative and intended to expose social injustices. These media forms have been used not only to argue for social change, but to depict the actual problems and issues to audiences, thus, they help 'to bring new knowledges about, for example, welfare, racial prejudice, poverty-related crime into the public arena and make them comprehensible' (2005:4-5). However, they challenge the notion that these forms were a standard of political filmmaking to which RTV should return. By contrast, they suggest that the success of RTV is predicated on a different agenda 'which is more often about commercial commitment to provide platforms for ordinary people but is also, much more strongly, about the exhibition of the self and of the psyche. Here the production of knowledge inform and instruct audiences in how to manage the self and one's immediate environment rather than the social' (ibid:5). In their view, RTV's revelation is mostly about the self, the personal, rather than the social, which is proved by audiences reception because they 'often gauge the authenticity or truthfulness of reality TV on a scale of emotional realism and personal revelation' (ibid).

Therefore, the knowledge produced by RTV, for them, is about the individual. Obviously, their statement represents the constructed domination of the individual over the social and the collective, which complies with the neoliberal focus on individualism.

RTV's revelation of course is about the social. For example, in the *Celebrity Big Brother 5* (UK, Channel 4) broadcast in January 2007, Jade Goody made derogatory and racist comments to her fellow housemate Indian actress Shilpa Shetty. It led to a lasting controversy; with the British broadcasting regulator Ofcom received a record number of more than 40,000 complaints from members of the public³⁸. Goody was accused of her racially bullying behaviour. However, Sara Ahmed (2007) comments, 'what was at stake was the desire to locate racism in the body of Jade Goody, who comes to stand for the ignorance of the white working class, as a way of showing that 'we' (Channel 4 and its well-meaning liberal viewers) are not racist like that'.³⁹ It indicates that the importance of RTV analysis largely lies in its revelation of the depoliticizing effect of focusing on the individual and the deep-hidden ideas in the society.

During his interview with a Chinese magazine, *Nan Fang People*, Zizek says,

At present days, we are still 'in' the ideology, rather than the post-ideology. However, this ideology is no longer a big political regime or philosophical program. It is now the very trivial, trifling, personal experience, pervasive in your daily life and your interactivity with others. When we think that we can forget the ideological struggle, it is precisely the time when it is most powerful. Because, when we deny the existence of ideology, it only means that ideology has incarnated itself in our daily practices. (2007 vol.17)

To some extent, Biressi and Nunn's research on RTV in fact embody Zizek's assessment. According to them, RTV 'depicts the rhythms and structures of everyday life with the least recourse possible to do dramatisation and artifice, and conveys a sense of immediacy, intimacy, and 'unscripted' material featuring 'real' people' (2005:3). In this sense, RTV offers a wonderful opportunity to observe how ideology operates nowadays on level of ordinary people's daily life. They do point out that RTV and its knowledge of the individual should be understood 'within the context of the changing social and political climate of the post-Thatcherite/Reaganite era' (ibid:4). In doing so, it is actually an opportunity to criticize society and its discursive mechanism. However, implying RTV's revelation is less about the social, they either themselves limit the significance of understanding RTV in the social context, or sidestep ideological criticism, which demonstrates that they might have accepted that 'capitalism is the only game in town' and it is a post-ideological society. It is where their research falls short.

³⁸ BBC News (2007) *I'm not racist, says TV's Goody*. [online] available from <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6281223.stm>>[20 January 2007]

³⁹ Ahmed, S. (n.d.) "*Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony – Its an Empirical Fact*" – A response to Slavoj Zizek' (unpublished manuscript). [online] available from <http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=454>

It could be argued that revelation in documentary is different to that of RTV. Documentary offers an opportunity of denaturalising objects, relations and behaviors that dominant ideology seeks to naturalise or to turn into what appears to be common sense. The significance of documentary is to reveal not only the truth but also the reason behind the truth. By contrast, RTV's revelation is more subtle. Applying the production skills of documentary, it is capable of producing knowledge through revelation, truth-telling and exposure, yet RTV might also function as a channel to communicate ideas with different groups, becomes a site for hegemonic struggle. The idea of the possibility of RTV being a space for discursive interactivity is represented in the work of Dovey,⁴⁰ which suggests RTV as empowerment, 'has strengthened the mission of public service by fostering interactive participation in social space, releasing everyday voices into the public sphere, and challenging established paternalisms' (2000:83).

Empowerment or Intervention?

RTV's empowerment can also be discussed from the perspective of technological interactivity. Andrejevic develops ideas concerning the implications of audience involvement through interactive technology,

On the one hand is the promise of interactivity----that access to the means of media production will be thrown open to the public at large.....On the other hand is the reality represented by RTV.....that interactivity functions increasingly as a form of productive surveillance allowing for the commodification of the products generated by what I describe as the work of being watched. (2004:2)

In his view, RTV offers viewers an opportunity to see it happen, and even to make it happen (a measure of control), by various means of interactivity. But in fact, it is 'the participation of consumers in the rationalisation of their own consumption [that] is sold as 'empowerment'' (ibid:15). Andrejevic states that interactivity, or empowerment, does not 'break down the central-controlled, top-down authorized modern industry mechanism' (ibid: 89), on the contrary, the productive surveillance is in line with the nature of the late, flexible capitalism, which 'is associated with the generalisation of surveillance and the de-differentiation of the boundaries between production and consumption' (ibid: 45). For him, it is important to understand how 'the revolutionary potentiality of new media is absorbed by the existing social hierarchy' (Darin Barney 2000:19), rather than subverting the existing social relations.

⁴⁰ Three critical positions concerning RTV, summarised by Dovey in *Freakshow* (2000:83):

- 1) contemporary popular media are the product of a market-led political economy and therefore culturally suspect. (The Trash TV position);
- 2) contemporary factual television has strengthened the mission of public service by fostering interactive participation in social space, releasing everyday voices into the public sphere and challenging established paternalisms. (Reality TV as empowerment);
- 3) Reality TV is the ultimate example of the simulacrum in which the insistence upon realism is in direct proportion to the disappearance and irrelevance of any referential value. (Reality TV as nightmare).

Andrejevic contends that the interactivity, by means of productive surveillance, is not a shifting power but rather exploiting free labour. Working, family and leisure time are integrated. People do not need to work at certain spaces under forced monitoring. On the surface, workers seem to gain full freedom to balance their personal life and work. However, the surveillance conducted by their company via a network will be everywhere and all the time. Additionally, to get rid of bondage of space makes the labor market more competitive. Anyone from anywhere can be a competitor. Workers would face hiring and firing all the time. As Bourdieu contended, 'the ultimate basis of this economic order placed under the banner of individual freedom is indeed the *structural violence* of unemployment, of insecure employment and of the fear provoked by the threat of losing employment' (1998a: 98). Finally, the full 'freedom' of workers offers the capitalists a great opportunity to reduce costs such as office renting, long-term commitment to the welfare, insurance and benefits of their employees. The cost of constantly changing jobs and retraining would also become a norm, the responsibility and burden of the workers. It is a 'shift in the capital costs from the employer to the workers...workers are expected to absorb the costs of doing business' (Barney 2000:146). Without doubt, it is in accordance with the neoliberal logic of self-reliance and self-responsibility. As Steve Pruitt and Tom Barrett state, 'if the individual takes full advantage of cyberspace and becomes an independent economic unit, he will need to become more self-reliant' (1991:406).

In general, RTV does not represent the current conjuncture; it intervenes into the conjuncture and enhances particular skills required by it. As Anna McCathy (2007) argues, programmed adopt the neoliberal idea of personal responsibility, self-discipline, and teamwork, etc., which benefit the corporations. Couldry (2008) directly states that *Big Brother* functions as a 'theatre' for the performance of neoliberalism, in order for people to accept the values presented. He assesses *Big Brother* as inventing a cultural imagination to 'interpret the dynamic of a neoliberal working space which is full of compulsive self-performance, mandatory team work as well as the place that its rules and values are mediated by the external authority, hence it cannot be challenged or subverted' (ibid: 11). In this sense, RTV, such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, contributes to the construction of capitalist realism, which makes people to accept 'this is the way things are now' (Fisher and Gilbert 2013:90). Couldry concludes that neoliberalism, as a form of discourse, operates under the veil of common sense, so people unknowingly consent to a number of consequences induced by the cruelty of neoliberalism. Thus, the statement about RTV's empowerment claimed by those producers, such as Sue Woodward⁴¹, can be read as just rhetoric under the logic of the market, and the appeal of the real is deployed as a pervasive but false promise of democratisation. RTV, after all, fits with the state's neoliberal strategy. In the Chinese context, the debates about RTV's empowerment initially centered on audiences' voting in talent shows (Chapter 3). However, the main part of the intensive debates in the Chinese context is about how to counterbalance RTV's entertainment with so called 'media responsibility' for social good, which is identified by

⁴¹ Gareth Palmer has noted, in his interview with Sue Woodward (producer of *Crimefile*, Granada), the word empowerment was used seven times in 40 minutes, 'this is not an entertainment programme. It is about empowerment...the feeling that they can do something...empower the viewer' (in Dovey 2000:87).

John Corner as 'civic purpose' (2002). In China, television is treated as the speaker of the socialist ideology, whilst television also participates in the market. The contradiction between the neoliberal and the socialist, revealed by and represented in CCTV, seeks a suture under the veil of common sense.

Moulding the Body and Self-Governance

Jack Z. Bratich (2006) examines reality gameshows, *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *Fear Factor* and *The Prank Show* in particular, as a cultural form of what Gilles Deleuze calls 'control societies' (1995a, 1995b). He elucidates,

The ways RTV programs compose, decompose, and mobilise subjects, isolating two broad trends: a) making individuals interchangeable and collaborative to integrate into the game design and b) testing the bodily and mental limits of individuals. The goal of these transformations is the creation of malleable subjects (or 'dividuals') adequate to new conditions of sovereignty.
(2006:66)

It is a continuous intervening force aimed to mould the subjects. For him, RTV is more about intervention, rather than representation.⁴²

Mysoe (2003) also proposes, 'more work needs to be done on television's increasingly proactive role in shaping the citizenry—like *The New You*, it makes itself useful'. Ong clearly says that the neoliberal logic and market-driven calculation requires new governmentality⁴³ to remake the social and citizen subjects as 'free, self-managing and self-enterprising individuals in different spheres of everyday life' (2006:14). In this respect, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay provide their theory by looking at lifestyle shows as educational, but refer to the knowledge offered by these shows as 'cultural technology'. They want to 'underscore the extent to which television culture is an object of regulation, policy, and programmed designed to nurture citizenship and civil society, and an instrument for educating, improving, and shaping subjects' (2008:14). An array of knowledge offered by expert mechanism in these shows, such as affordable healthcare, self-improvement advices, lifestyle instruction, functions as a crucial supplement of public welfare, guides the self-governance including the ethics, behaviors, aspirations of ordinary people, and teaches citizen how to live in this capitalist society by maximising their 'choices, efficiency and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions' (ibid: 6). RTV is 'instrumentalised as part of programmed of social service, social welfare, and social management'(ibid:17), as they state, 'television becoming more useful to a rationality of

⁴² Bratich shares the opinion with Andrejevic that the surveillance has extended from the traditional institutions of disciplinary societies, such as factories, schools, prisons and other stationary spaces, into a full range of ordinary people's daily life. RTV, for him, 'is the cultural form for control society's most effective operation: the de- and recomposition of subjects mobilised to work on their own in an immanent circuit of command mechanisms' (2006:75).

⁴³ In Foucault's view, governmentality refers to array of knowledges and techniques that are concerned with the systematic and pragmatic guidance and regulation of everyday conduct.

governing that emphasises self-empowerment as condition of citizenship' (ibid:6-7).

For them, lifestyle programming advance liberal strategies of 'governing at a distance', which emphasises self-governance, self-improvement and self-reliance. It only suggests that they do not intend to critique the current neoliberal system. Though they claim that thinking of television as a cultural technology allows them to move beyond the concerns of political economy and cultural studies, however, their theory is devoted again to the idea of the end of ideology. In addition, the reason they claim so is because their use of Foucault's theory, focus on 'power inscribes itself into the body directly, bypassing ideology' (Zizek 1994a:12). However, as Zizek comments,

This abandoning of the problematic of ideology entails a fatal weakness of Foucault's theory. Foucault never tires of repeating how power constitutes itself 'from below', how it does not emanate from some unique summit: this very semblance of a Summit (the Monarch or some other embodiment of Sovereignty) emerges as the secondary effect of the plurality of micro-practices, of the complex network of their interrelations. However, when he is compelled to display the concrete mechanism of this emergence, Foucault resorts to the extremely suspect rhetoric of complexity, evoking the intricate network of lateral links, left and right, up and down . . . a clear case of patching up, since one can never arrive at Power this way---the abyss that separates microprocedures from the spectre of Power remains unbridgeable. (ibid)

Therefore, Zizek sides with Althusser on this matter and includes the concept of the ISA in his own theory by naming it as 'ideology for-itself'.

Ouellette and Hay obviously do not take TV as an ISA, however, they cannot deny that lifestyle RTV is responding to the neoliberal idea of the state's governing strategy. In fact, both British and American governments advocate neoliberal rationality of individual responsibility. Bush (2005), in his second inaugural address, explicitly talks about 'preparing our people for the challenge of life in a free society, making every citizen an agent of his or her own destiny.'⁴⁴ In the UK, three political regimes, Thatcherism, New Labour and the coalition, all follow the neoliberal path. As David Cameron (2013) tells the BBC: 'we are all Thatcherites now.'⁴⁵ By explicitly promulgating individual obligations of self-reliance, self-management, self-discipline, the governments have 'thoroughly undermined the redistributive egalitarian consensus that underpinned the welfare state, with painful consequences for socially vulnerable groups such as women, old people, the young and the ethnic minorities' (Hall 2013).⁴⁶ In summary, the Western RTV, as

⁴⁴ NPR (2005) *President Bush's second Inaugural address*. [online] available from <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172>>[1 January 2005]

⁴⁵ Watt N.(2013) 'Thatcher funeral: Cameron says, 'we are all Thatcherites now''. *The Guardian* [online] 17 April. available from <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/17/margaret-thatcher-funeral-cameron-respect>>[17 April 2013]

⁴⁶ Hall, S.(2013) 'The Kilburn Manifesto: our challenge to the neoliberal victory'. *The Guardian* [online]

knowledge production systems, responds to the government's neoliberal policy, offers the platform for ordinary participants to transform as required by means of schooling, 24/7 hours of surveillance, physical/mental challenges, etc., and thereby, contributes to their subjection to the neoliberal rationality. It is RTV intervening into the social reality.

The 'Do-good' Programme and the Good Citizen

'Do-good' programme, for Ouellette (2008,2010), is again suggests RTV's function as an educator, which communicates to the viewer about civic duties, a value of reaching out and public service. She picks up *Extreme Makeover Home Edition (EMHE)*⁴⁷ as epitomising the style of 'do-good' show, which presents the real life hardship and the poverty of struggling families and rewards them by a renovated house, due to their enduring the hardship in silence and still volunteering for helping others. She believes that 'do-good' RTV is contributing to good citizenship. Her work, along with Hay's work, is at risk of the possible collusion with neoliberalism.

John McMurria (2008) precisely criticizes *EMHE* by looking at it within the context of the state's retreating from its social responsibility and pushing more social responsibility to corporate and families. For him, the show is explicit about the idea of the self-reliant citizen. It is the Good Samaritan required by the neoliberal logic.⁴⁸ As Lisa Duggan puts it,

The neoliberal consensus----which spans the conservative Reagan and Bush administrations of the 1980s, Clinton's centrist New Democrats, and George W. Bush's 'compassionate conservatives'----has supported 'a leaner, meaner government (fewer social services, more 'law and order'), a state supported but 'privatise' economy, an invigorated and socially responsible civil society, and a moralised family with gendered marriage at its center. (2003:10)

Therefore, the social services are re-engineered to be privatised through personal responsibility, as the state retreats from providing proper public services, 'more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family' (ibid:15-16). As we see in *EMHE*, the neoliberal principles such as corporate benevolence, volunteerism and self responsibility are exercised to intervene into the serious social issues.

'Do-good' programmed, with their aim to shape the good citizen, would be warmly welcomed without doubt by all governments. However, the definition of good citizen might

24 April. available from<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/24/kilburn-manifesto-challenge-neoliberal-victory>>[24 April 2013]

⁴⁷ *EMHE*: premiering on ABC in December 2003, each week a typical episode has an energetic design team 'surprise' a needy family with a good morning wake-up call, then sends them away for a weeklong vacation while their home is rebuilt. Many of these families have suffered severe health issues, lost loved ones from accidents or suffered property damage from floods and fires, etc.

⁴⁸ Even in juridical RTV such as *Cops* and *Judge Judy*, it is palpable that the state institutions are rarely invoked to protect the collective social welfare but rather to teach individual responsibility, which is the core of neoliberal rationality.

be different due to the ideological, political, economic, and cultural reasons in different contexts. For example, in the Chinese context, the central government would expect a good citizen to be self-motivated, exercising an entrepreneurial ethic of self-care, and also morally sound in the individual interest-driven competition. So, in the face of the market, as the capitalist institution and bearer of ideology, how does an alleged socialist subject react and adapt? *TEP* offers an answer by depicting a 'perfect' urban youth (Chapter 5). Herein, the representational analysis is necessary, as it interprets cultural identities produced. As Turner says, with RTV now standing in the frontline, 'media now operates as the authors or translators of cultural identities' (2010:66).

Representation and Cultural Identity

It is often found that representational analysis in the UK relates to the issue of gender, class, and sexuality. As Wood and Skeggs (2004) argue, makeover, lifestyle programmed such as *What Not to Wear* (BBC2), *Life Laundry* (BBC2) have been giving lessons about how to make the self a more aesthetically appealing and thus competent femininity, or behave as a responsible, ethically competent self. They found that the experts, often middle class, in the show have to school these participants or viewers to overcome their inadequacies, escape their 'lack' through self-governance and appropriating 'better' taste, which rearticulate class divisions and patriarchal structures as issues of lifestyle choice. Succinctly, it is class and gender divisions drawn by means of judgments on taste, one is put in the position of being superb, watching, evaluating and judging the other as the incompetent. Makeover RTV becomes what Bourdieu termed a 'taste-maker' (1984:91), which exploits 'the entertainment value of watching the incompetent subjectivity' (Turner 2010:51). The temptation is described by Rachel Moseley as follows, 'for those ill at ease with the 'excess of the ordinary' such programmed produce a retreat into a position of class and taste-based superiority' (2000:314). Palmer comments that the middle-class style that these shows advocate legitimise the taste hierarchies that maintain the economic structures of class inequality. For him, the significance of lifestyle RTV 'may lie in the ways in which it helps to mould and to legitimise our class membership' (2004:189).

In this, culture has become a resource in self-making and subjectivity making. For Skeggs, class struggle now takes a new form by means of gaining access to resources, the ability to make cultural resources a 'property' (2005:972-73) and apply them to morally evaluate and judge others. Moreover, it is a daily cultural struggle around authorisation, 'in which those who are positioned to make judgments of other's subjectivity are continually de-authorized by those who are positioned to be judged' (2005:975). In the light of Gramsci, it is a war of position, the cultural hegemonic struggle, as Skeggs states, 'it is not just a matter of using some aspects of the culture of the working class to enhance one's value, but also maintaining the *position of judgment* to attribute value, which assigns the other as immoral, repellent, abject, worthless, disgusting, even disposable' (ibid: 977).

Property, for Skeggs,

Is no longer a thing, or relationship between a person and a thing, or a network

of relationships between persons with respect to things...Instead, property is determined as a *set of entitlements*, which are exclusive to an owner, or to the holder of the proprietary *interest*. When culture is converted into a property right at the expense of the person who cannot hold these rights to culture, then exploitation can occur. (Ibid: 972)

This is the formation of exploitation in the field of the symbolic economy, which indicates the class relation. In this sense, Skeggs believes that her class analysis suggests 'a reversal of Marx, moving beyond (but still with) the economic----perceived to be a discursive system----into understanding value more generally to understand how class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realised (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange' (ibid: 969). The 'but still with' actually demonstrates her cautious and ambivalence, because, she notices that RTV also repeats all the moral obsessions historically associated with the working class, produce 'dramatic tension through the oppositions offered by categories of class and gender' (Wood and Skeggs 2004:207). In other words, RTVs redrawing of class division is actually still within (not beyond) the framework offered by the traditional measures of classification defined by the economic position. Perhaps, we could say, the distinct meaning of choice has already been sutured by the traditional categories, which are decided by the economic class inequality.

In regard to the self-making, Skeggs also states that it is now the world of 'compulsory individuality' (2005:973-4). An individual nowadays has no choice but to choose their repertoire of the self, and 'this choice expresses and displays the inner authentic individuality and subjectivity of that person...individuality is not an option but rather, for some, is the compulsory route to selfhood' (ibid: 974). However, the working-class women, as forms of selfhood, are often found appearing on RTV as 'bad selves', such as the bad mother (*Supernanny*), the bad wife (*Wife Swap*), the bad dresser (*What Not to Wear*), the bad glutton (*You Are What You Eat*), 'who do not know how to tell their identities properly and show that they cannot operate an ethical self' (ibid). Whilst the display of the ethically complete self is seen as a sign of one's social responsibility, self-governance, morality and values, the white working-class women just fail to do so, which makes them to be judged as 'the national constitutive limit to propriety' (2005:968). Skeggs finally contends that presenting the white working-class women as bad selves in RTV 'epitomises the zeitgeist of the moment----a crisis in middle-class authority and security' (ibid). It is the projection of this crisis onto the body of the white working-class woman. So, what is the Chinese version of this?

In China, a dating show, *If You Are the One*, also makes a negative image of a woman as a gold digger, and socialist values are imposed as the 'right' culture. I argue, it is closely related to the classification in post-Mao China; in particular the rich-poor divide (Chapter 4). These girls' materialistic discourses in choosing suitors actually represent a communal anxiety. The social antagonism between rich and poor is projected and condensed onto the identities and discourses of these women. In this sense, my analysis is a class

analysis as well.

The RTV Audience

In regard to the audience research on RTV, the research usually focuses on audience's pleasure, why they watch and enjoy RTV. For example, Zizi Papacharissi and Andrew L. Mendelson (2007) study this issue by applying a uses and gratifications model. Steven Reiss and James Wiltz (2004) evaluate why audiences watch RTV by categorising 16 basic desires as motivations. Hill states that distinguishing the moment of authenticity from performance is an important strategy and pleasure for audience's watching (2005:57-78). Additionally, Andejevic locates a 'savvy stance' taken up by his interviewees, from where the much of the pleasure of RTV watching comes, 'viewers gain pleasure from the belief that they have a good idea of how the media are contriving and staging events for their benefit' (Kilborn 2005:626). As Jian Miaoru (2008) further argues, this 'savvy stance' has a connection with the audience's 'technical skills' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 142-43) and the concept of 'psychotechnology' (de Kerckhove 1995).

However, what this research focuses on is the audience's *jouissance* and desire. Therefore, I read the audience and their reception as slips, and as symptoms to reveal the socialist ideological fantasy. It is the ideological fantasy that captures their *jouissance* and desire, and soothes their anxiety for facing socially structured antagonism (Chapter 5, 6).

Conclusion

The above three sections of literature review shape the development of the argument and offer the theoretical framework for this thesis, as well as Western RTV research as reference. This study tries to understand the implication of CRTV's representation, revelation, and intervention within the Chinese context, particularly the relation between the neoliberal market and the socialist fantasy. First, I devote the next chapter to examine the uncomfortable situation of SARFT when it promotes the cultural market reform but simultaneously regulates the CRTV market.

Chapter Three

Contradiction and Discomfort

----Chinese Reality TV and the Market

Introduction

RTV is a new cost-effective television product. Since 1990s, it has spread all over the world, yet with different characteristics in different areas. As discussed in Chapter 2, most Western research has been steered towards more popular programmed in the Western context such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, lifestyle and makeover programmed. Roughly, the critique of relationship-involved, game shows speaks from two positions. One is the analysis of RTV format, content and its ideology. For example, Andrejevic (2004) argues that RTV is generated by exploiting the work of being watched, and that surveillance blurs the boundary between working, family and leisure time. The pressure of flexible working, competing in a global labour market, and absorbing costs of training, etc., is all put upon the individual as an independent economic unit. It suggests that the individual need to be more self-reliant, which is in accordance with the neoliberal logic of self-responsibility. Similarly, Couldry states that *Big Brother* has invented a cultural imagination to 'interpret the dynamic of a neoliberal working space' (2008:11), therefore, it is the theatre in which the ideology of neoliberalism is presented, aiming for the values presented to be accepted by the people. RTV simulates the competitive situation in the modern market and contributes to the construction of capitalist realism, 'this is the way things are now' (Fisher and Gilbert 2013:90). It proves that the media 'structure our perception of reality in advance and render reality indistinguishable from the 'aestheticized' image of it' (Zizek 1994a:14). Thus, it is difficult for people to escape the control of the market.

In addition, there are critiques of RTVs production and diffusion, which condemn producers for focusing too much on ratings and sacrificing the morality of content. RTV, such as *Temptation Island*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother* and *Loft Story*, have been condemned for exposing too much sexual material, and the weakness of humanity in the context of vicious competition. These programmed are often referred to as 'Trash TV': 'the product of a market-led political economy and therefore culturally suspect'(Dovey 2000:83). However, these 'culturally suspect' content, such as sexual material, fierce competition, belligerence, egotism, hedonism, proved to be a huge temptation for audiences all over the world as indicated through the high ratings and phenomenal monetary rewards. It triggers again a heated debate on the legitimacy of view ratings and its market-centred logic. As is being explicitly said in *Omega Report: Communications Policy* (1984), 'the only fair criterion for judging programme quality is by how many people like it. ...High ratings ought to be accepted as the yardstick of what people want and should not be regarded as the object of disdain' (quoted in Peter Goodwin 1998:72). Succinctly, RTV represents the television media's marketisation. In other words, media itself is part of the market, practices the doctrine of the market, with cultural products as their commodities. Therefore, Zizek says, 'the market and (mass) media are dialectically interconnected' (1994a:14).

Further, the phenomenon of the global franchise of RTV is precisely based on its promise of high ratings, with relative low production costs. In addition, RTV is easily localised by encouraging and exploiting the participation of local audiences. Producing RTV, therefore, is taken as a cost-effective way to conquer the competitive television market in many areas. As Hill says, 'the rise of reality TV came at a time when networks were looking for a quick fix solution to economic problems within the cultural industries' (2005:41). This assessment of the rise of RTV in the Western media environment suits the situation in the Chinese context as well. CRTV started in 2000, right after the State Council issued the 82nd document in 1999, which clarified the nature of radio and television as an industry. In 2002, the 16th CPC National Congress explicitly advanced the reform of the cultural market in order to develop the socialist cultural industries. Radio and television are listed as an important component of cultural industries. In China, even though the television channels are state-owned ideological apparatuses, they still have to deal with the pressure of marketisation during the period of market-driven reform. In other words, they cannot resist the temptation of ratings and monetary rewards, which motivates them to transplant RTV. RTV, in summary, opened a new nationwide television market in China, starting officially with Chinese version of *Survivor* in 2000. Yet the development of RTV in the Chinese context is different than the Western context. Succinctly, the ideological formation of Western texts is different to that of Chinese ones. Western are capitalist through and through within the context of social democracy. The deregulation and marketisation of media industries in America and Western Europe largely contribute to the good performance of RTV in a competitive, multichannel television market. As mentioned above, the content or design of programmed also reflect the neoliberal idea, such as self-reliance, self-responsibility. However, China, in the post-Mao era, is a socialist state but is introducing market economy, with the ideological baggage that involves. Therefore, transplanting RTV causes ideological problems at three levels within the Chinese context.

Firstly and most importantly, RTV production pursuing ratings under the guidance of market logic, challenges the state's control of the market in an increasingly global neoliberal direction. Neoliberalism, as a market ideology, seeks to limit the scope and activity of government. As Bourdieu suggested, the neoliberal utopia 'preaches the subordination of nation states to the demands of economic freedom for the masters of the economy, with the suppression of all regulations on all markets' (1998a: 101). The freedom of choice, to buy in the television market is even promulgated as embodying the political emancipation of the audiences. It is 'a postulated connection between democracy and the market' (Bourdieu 2003:86) being exploited by television media. As Bourdieu argued, 'the effects of audience ratings...confer a *democratic legitimacy* to the market model by posing in *political* terms (as, for example, a referendum), what is a problem of *cultural* production and diffusion' (1998b: 74). It explains that why Doug Herzog⁴⁹, the ex-president of FOX (1998-2000), speaks in its defence as follow, 'television has the autonomy to produce entertainment content which pander to the pleasure of audiences.' Secondly, those 'culturally suspect' contents, such as egoism, materialistic behavior, and

⁴⁹ Sina (2001) *Decadency causes controversy*. [online] available from
<http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/29889.html> [January 12, 2001]

vicious competition, reflect neoliberal ideas and conflict with socialist ideology that focuses on collectivism and egalitarianism. Critics generally accused television channels of focusing too much on viewing ratings and entertainment, failing to take social responsibility and encourage socialist values. These contents are directly referred to as 'Western negative values', believed to threaten the socialist ideology of Chinese society, i.e. the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems. Thirdly, these reality programmed actually reveal social reality such as the enlarging gap between rich and poor as the obverse, negative consequence of introducing market economy, therefore, imply the contradiction between the collective-oriented socialism and the individual-centred neoliberalism, or in other words, the legitimacy of the neoliberal market in a socialist context.

In this situation, SARFT, as an ISA and the highest media administrative institution, quickly intervenes into the television market, and regulates the development of CRTV. As a result of a series of regulatory acts, the *Big Brother* format no longer exists in the Chinese television market, with only one experiment, *Perfect Holiday*⁵⁰ (Chinese version of *Big Brother*), produced by Hunan TV in 2002 and banned after 20 episodes by SARFT.⁵¹ The *Survivor* format has also been transformed into that of an individual tackling obstacles, a show similar to *Wipeout* (ABC, produced by Endemol USA), sports related programmed focusing on physical performance, and lately in 2014, the celebrity-involved game show Chinese version of *Running Man* (Korean SBS). What it was before and how it changed will be discussed in this chapter shortly. CRTV currently popular are mostly talent shows (*The Voice of China*), dating shows (*If You are the One*, Chinese version of *Take Me Out*), game shows (Chinese version of *Running Man*) and social experiment shows (*The Exchange Programme*, Chinese version of *Living with the Amish* (UK, Channel 4)) (see Appendix 3 for more information). In order to clarify the development of CRTV, to answer why CRTV is as it is now, it is important to look at what content is encouraged in the Chinese context, what is regulated, how and why, and also the role of SARFT, its regulatory acts, and its affect on the evolvement of CRTV. The attitude of SARFT towards RTV in fact reveals its own uncomfortable situation of facing the ideological contradiction between the individual-centred market and socialism.

⁵⁰ In 2002, Hunan economy channel and Beijing Vhand Media co-produced *Perfect Holiday*, the first Chinese version of *Big brother*. 13 male and female participants with different backgrounds, i.e. occupation, age and education, were arranged in a luxury villa for living together for 70 days, with no contacts with outside. 60 surveillance cameras were set up to record for 24 hours. It received very high ratings, as well as the intensive controversy amongst the audiences. The belligerence amongst housemates directly conflicts with the state's advocacy of harmony. After 20 episodes, the show was banned by SARFT.

⁵¹ Recently, a Chinese online video site, Youku Tudou, says that it is bringing the *Big Brother* to China again early next year through collaborating with Endemol China. Youku Tudou has operated with fewer restriction that state-owned television broadcasters it faces.

Chinadaily (2014). *Reality tv show 'Big Brother' to debut in China*. [online] available from <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/tech/2014-10/29/content_18821659.htm>[29 October 2014]

Therefore, this chapter traces the evolvement of the Chinese *Survivor* and a talent show *Super Girl* in order to address some of the contradictions currently facing the government in China. On the one hand, there is the myth of 'development and transition' in an increasingly global neoliberal direction. On the other, interventions in the production of such CRTV serve to downplay social issues, e.g. vicious marketing competition, enlarging gap between rich and poor. By re-constructing the ideological binary opposition between the West and China, such interventions are helping to reaffirm the superiority of communist ideology. By acting as a means of resisting any weakening of state sovereignty, they thus serve to maintain the legitimacy of the neoliberal market in the post-Mao Chinese context. The media administrative institution has to deal with the threat of market forces but maintain its legitimacy simultaneously, which puts it in an uncomfortable situation. This chapter firstly analyses the discursive construction of Them and Us, then looks at censorship based on these discourses. It further elaborates SARFT's regulation of *Super Girl* and finally explains the *status quo* of CRTV.

Them and Us

Formats, such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor* and *Loft Story*, are designed around a giant prize. In order to win, the household has to go through a series of competitions and co-operations arranged by the producer. Everyone has to compete with everyone else until only one winner is left. The whole process is full of plots and betrayals. For surviving the dangerous mission or weekly elimination, the participants are wandering between morality and expediency all the time. When the motivation is to maximise personal interests, it necessarily advocates the self-seeking, egotistical behaviour. Zhou Juan, a former participant of *Canyon Survivor Camp* (Guizhou satellite TV, 2003), was asked whether she has given in to the 'evil' side of humanity in the show. She said, 'I was eliminated too soon before I got a chance to show my 'evil' side. My time was too short. But if I had played longer and confronted him in a person-to-person battle, I would have shown my 'evil' side without doubt'. Such discourse manifests the principle of personal interests first of social Darwinism. For Bourdieu, social Darwinism is where the strength of the neo-liberal ideology based, 'it is 'the brightest and the best'...who come out on top' (1998a: 42). Following this principle, the egotistical behavior is stimulated in these reality programmed. The audiences witness the expediency, personal conceit and individual belligerence when participants confront money, sex and self-interest. It increases the vigilance of media experts and the unease of the national media regulatory institution. They believe that contents like these would threaten Chinese values and lead to moral decadence.

As TV show planner Xi Hong says, emphasising confrontation and competition will inevitably entice the 'evil' side of human nature and behaviour such as intrigue, back stabbing and a barbaric environment. He also directly claims, 'it is clearly not consistent with the traditional Chinese morality and ethical standards, nor does it comply with the Chinese audiences' pleasure'.⁵² However, he overlooks the weakening of traditional

⁵² Li Hongyu (2003) 'Reality TV challenges Chinese context----morality and righteousness as shackles'. *Southern Weekend* [online] 18 September. available from

Chinese morality in this market-driven, competition-focused society. These contents actually foreground the contradictions between collective-oriented socialism and neoliberalism that focuses on competitive individualism. Similarly, scholar Yin Hong believes, 'as formats transplanted from Western countries, reality TV has a different nature compared to Chinese culture. It needs more time to grow to be a popular and mainstream television format in China. Combining this format with Chinese tradition would make it fall apart. If it was presented in a completely 'Western' way, it would not be accepted by the majority' (see note 52). According to these comments, it seems that the egoistical, materialistic and sexual content belong only to the West, which is in conflict with the socialist collectivism, communist values and Chinese tradition. However, as Marshall Berman states,

If this culture were really exclusively Western, and hence as irrelevant to the Third World as most of its governments say, would these governments need to expend as much energy repressing it as they do? What they are projecting onto aliens, and prohibiting as 'Western decadence', is in fact their own people's energies and desires and critical spirit. (1982:125)

Therefore, Them versus Us is actually a construction at the level of discourse. Truth is, these programmed are confronted with moral condemnation in relatively open-minded Western countries as well. As Divina Frau-Meigs says, *Big Brother* has roused the opposition of people and been denounced in terms of its format and message, 'which were said to be conducive to humiliation, confinement, even alienation. In Greece and French-speaking Belgium, the regulatory agencies intervened and made recommendations to the producers and broadcasters in the name of the protection of human dignity' (2006:48). Similar objection emerged in the UK as well. As Hill says, 'articles such as 'Danger: Reality TV can Rot Your Brain', 'Ragbag of Cheap Thrills' or 'TV's Theatre of Cruelty' are typical of the type of commentary that dominates discussion of reality programming' (2005:7). It is the tolerance of the media system and political system, which follows the neoliberal path of marketisation, in both Europe and America, give producers freedom to produce such programmed.⁵³

The construction of Them and Us at the level of discourse in fact has a long history. As promulgated in CPC's discourse over the years, the Western capitalist has been labelled as being weak-willed, profit-motivated, and therefore, could be easily decadent due to their inability to resist the temptation of material pleasure, money and sex. These behaviours are held in contempt by the revolutionary communist warriors who hold the belief that just as rust eats away iron, indulgence in bourgeois ways of life may eat away

<<http://www.southcn.com/weekend/culture/200309180034.htm>>[18 September 2003]

⁵³ Further, Turner states, 'the mainstream media benefit from ratings by publishing the latest news of housemates, on one side, attack RTV for its crassness and happily describe it as the nadir of contemporary entertainment, take the moral high ground by deploring the programme and treating the personalities it creates with contempt, on the other side' (2010:34-5). The media adds fuel to the flames, meanwhile, fishes for themselves the moral reputation.

one's revolutionary will. Strong-will, no submission to temptation and hard struggle represent very important aspects of communist moral superiority. This should not be seen as simply an argument between capitalist and communist at the level of discourse. It in fact reflects 'a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony' (Edward Said 1978:5). It suggests a hegemonic struggle between different views of facts, as there are no such facts 'unbiased by any discursive devices or conjunctions with power' (Žižek 1994a:10). Derrida also confirmed this when he said that, between binary oppositions like Them and Us, 'we are not dealing with...peaceful coexistence...but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs...the other or has the upper hand' (1972:41). Tying the weakness and 'decadence' to the West is in line with what Mouffe comments,

The political is played out in the moral register. In other words, it still consists in a Them/Us discrimination, but the Them/Us, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between 'right and left' we are faced with a struggle between 'right and wrong'.
(2005:5)

The West exists as the other in the communist ideology, the Them/Us confrontation is visualised as a moral one between good and evil, the presence of the West and its ills is seen to highlight the superiority and uniqueness of communist values.⁵⁴

This argument produces a new issue that needs to be addressed. Collectivism, as the core belief of socialism and communism, suggests the sacrifice, dedication, service and contribution to the country and society. With collectivism as the core of party-state ideology, the Chinese government does not allow individual interest to step above collective interest. Instead, the individuals are usually advocated to sacrifice their own interest to promote to the good of the nation. The destruction of collectivism by all aspects of self interest are what is manifested in these reality shows. However, 'selfishness' and 'egoism' are confused with 'individualism' in Chinese discourses. Attacking selfishness then equals attacking individualism. In the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (2000), the definition of 'individualism' is:

Self-concern, personal interests over collective interests, selfish with no care for others, wrong ideology. It is the results of the privatisation of the means of production. It is the core of bourgeois values. Its manifestation is multifaceted, such as individual heroism, liberalism, egoism, etc.

Apparently, individualism in China is more like an umbrella term that includes selfishness,

⁵⁴ It needs to be noted that 'othering' has always been reciprocal. Wang Lixin (2008:156-73) clarifies that how the United States constructs their own national identity by imagining China as the 'exotic', 'significant Other'. China always exists as the other, the positive one, the inferior one, or the controllable one. As American scholar Bruce Cumings comments, 'for Americans, China has always been a metaphor, rather than a country' (1996:39).

egoism etc., and it is not the same as the one that western countries have been adopting. In fact, egoism is an exaggerated love of self, which leads one to prefer himself/herself to everything or everyone in the world, whereas individualism teaches one to sever himself/herself with the spirit of self-care, self-reliance. And selfishness, as Alexis de Tocqueville described a long time ago in the 1830s, 'originates in blind instinct...is a vice as old as the world...individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to spread in the same ratio as the equality of condition' (1998:205). In *Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*, the definition of Individualism is:

1) the belief that the rights and freedom of individual people are the most important rights in a society; 2) the behaviour or attitude of someone who does things in their own way without being influenced by other people.

Robin M. Williams believes that individualism is about articulating self-fulfillment, democracy, equality and human rights, he explains,

To be a person is to be independent, responsible, and self-respecting, and thereby to be worthy of concern and respect in one's own right. To be a person, in this sense, is to be an autonomous and responsible agent, ...Not the unrestrained biologic human being, but the ethical, decision-making, unitary social personality is the object of this cult of the individual. (1960:463)

The value of individual democracy, individual freedom, and equality of individuals ensures capitalism's victory in the war against the ruling feudalism and theocracy. It protects and maintains the principle of 'private property ownership' and the 'democratic political system' of the modern capitalism, therefore, can be seen as the most important value of capitalist society. In the USA, the connotation of individualism also stresses personal progress, self-responsibility, self-motivation, self-regulation, self-expression and team work (On 2006). It represents the way neoliberalism has been taken up in the USA.

Because that 'selfishness' is confused with 'individualism', attacking selfishness, then, equals attacking individualism. Individualism is simply treated as the western dross that can be easily managed and regulated. By doing so, the central government performs its position as the righteous Left and transmits the message that individualism is under control. It suggests that the individual-centred market is under control in a socialist context. Ironically, neoliberal idea, such as self-reliance and individual competition, is still promulgated bluntly as natural basic rule in daily life. In other words, the government only controls individualism at the level of discourse, but its essence and the problem of neoliberal marketisation are still pervasive in daily life.

In contemporary China that has been intensely focusing on economic development, fierce competition is just the social reality of the free market in the name of neoliberal rationality. Not only are the social relations between different institutions changed, a kind of social Darwinism and a range of related social issues are also inevitably raised. The idea of

competitive individualism has emerged across a vast range of sites, which is against 'any notion of collectivity, of public good, of shared experience' (Bourdieu 1998a, 2003). The law of the barbaric environment and profit-driven selfishness inscribed in these RTV actually mirror the situation in present day China. John Ellis also argues, in programmed such as *Survivor*, *The Real World* (MTV), *Big Brother*, participants are 'thrown together by circumstances, they are mutually dependent but in order to survive have to stab each other in the back. The experience is akin to a modern workplace with its project-based impermanence, appraisal processes, and often ruthless corporate management' (2001:12). In other words, RTV reflects the cruelty of market competition in daily life. Certainly, revealing such social reality raises unease of the central government, therefore, most likely to be regulated. Practically, the state advances marketisation, promotes 'personal ownership' and appreciates its glory. Ideologically, on the contrary, the state promulgates collectivism and the belief that you still can have a happy life even without owning a property, as long as you 'count your blessings', because happiness consists in contentment.⁵⁵ It is not only a moral instruction, but also serves to soothe the group whose benefits are damaged. Competition is promoted, as it is good for the national fiscal revenue. The benefit of its people is put aside, so do the social agony. It reveals the government's omission, or once again, the impotence of 'liberal' democracy in the Chinese context.

In the Western context, one of the consequences of the New Right securing ascendancy is that 'liberty' is interpreted as the free market, free capital and possessive individualism, which precisely makes it impossible for the majority, limits the benefits of the others, and thus, limits the meaning of 'liberty' and makes it impossible to achieve socialist 'equality'. As Mouffe (1993) states that the idea of individualism has actually become an obstacle for democracy, the framework it offers must be abandoned. That is to say, the Left must fight to regain the idea of liberty and give it a different meaning in the context of developing democracy.⁵⁶ Laclau and Mouffe's theory is exactly built on their criticism of the individualism-centred idea of liberty. Therefore, it would be useful to see the regulation of CRTV as really about individualism. As Fisher states, in order to oppose neoliberalism we must set ourselves 'in opposition to the competitive individualist ideology which is the core of neoliberalism and its basic presuppositions' (2013:99). However, SARFT's regulatory

⁵⁵ In 2002 Chinese Spring Festival Gala, a song was named directly as 'Happiness Consists in Contentment'. The lyric was, 'we all have beautiful dreams, some succeed, some fail...the up and down of life is totally controlled by you', it suggests that success and failure could happen to everyone, you cannot blame others if you were living a tough life, it is all up to you. It also tries to educate everyone to count their blessings, as greed will bring disaster, 'let's live the ordinary life together'. The song promulgates the neoliberal idea of self-reliance, works to pacify the disadvantaged groups and serves to contribute to social stability and harmony (Lv 2003). Moreover, 'happiness consists in contentment' is promulgated as a belief for all good citizens.

⁵⁶ Mouffe further asserts that 'autonomy' is the significant meaning of the term 'liberty'. One can only gain liberty by participate in political, public affair as an autonomous agent. As she argues, 'it is only as citizens of a 'free state', of a community whose members participate actively in the government, that such individual liberty can be guaranteed' (1993: 63).

acts (see next section) are aimed at selfishness, rather than individualism, because the market economy reform in post-Mao China is precisely based on the individual-centred, market-driven neoliberal idea.⁵⁷

Finally, it needs to be noted, in the 1950s, 'the mass market was portrayed as that force which stood in opposition to the socialist state: a self-proliferating cornucopia of industrial capitalism and the symbol of western strength and prosperity' (Andrejevic 2004:13). However, as Harvey (2005) states, Open Reform started in 1978 was indeed the process of introducing market-driven neoliberalism into the Chinese context. By promoting a market economy, Chinese society has accepted some 'Western' values and adapted the capitalist notion of culture industries and tried to exclude others (Andrew Ross 2009). Wang Hui further argues, 'the dominance of neoliberalism in China is formed in the process of the state's trying to overcome its crisis of legitimacy by conducting economic reforms. It is an ideology dominating the state's policy, intellectual's praxis and media's values, it uses the myth of 'development and transition' to bridge its own paradox' (2001:2). The government believes that our society is in the middle of 'development and transition', and that all the imperfections will be fixed in the end, including issues, which are 'temporarily' put aside. Thus, social issues, such as increasing polarisation between poor and rich, the loss of social security, are covered by the formed common-sense assertion of 'development and transition'.

In general, the uncomfortable situation facing the government is that they cannot promote the individual-centred market, and accuse it at the same time. Therefore, tying 'badness' to the West is a way of China avoiding its own commitment to the neoliberal market. By tying all the 'badness' to the West or to the transitional period of Chinese society, fierce and immoral competitions emerging in the Chinese context can be seen as the Western dross, so that it can be identified, eliminated, or improved. Doing so, the government not only highlights the superiority of communism, but also maintains the legitimacy of the neoliberal market by rationalising the imperfection.

Censorship and Sovereignty

As discussed above, everything 'bad' is attributed to the West. One consequence of this is for media elites to call for localisation, and SARFT calls for modification of western RTV to bring it into line with the values of mainland China. Western media and cultural studies have been reluctant to draw absolute conclusions about the social-cultural effects of a single television program or even a collection of formats, but, as Turner observes, nations such as China, Malaysia, and the Arab world believe that 'the effective leading edge of western values and cultural identities is their media representation' (2010:63).

⁵⁷ The fact that the government does not attack individual-centred 'liberty' the way Mouffe does might also implies that the government is not interested into the autonomous, political-participation democracy pictured by Mouffe. The government has its own vision of democracy with Chinese character (Chapter 1). And it cannot be assumed that persons who experience a market economy will necessarily demand a democratic political system. There are exceptions in history, i.e. market economies with nondemocratic governments.

Furthermore, the Chinese government asserts that the content reflected in these shows would seriously damage the Chinese society and culture. RTV becomes a metaphor, a Trojan horse representing Western values. Therefore, SARFT starts its censorship by demanding that all the television channels dilute the 'evil' side of humanity, and eliminate so called 'negative Western values', cut out the grand-prize rewards and change the way they set up competition. Such regulation actually downplays the social situation currently, which would be otherwise reflected in the shows. Besides, all the channels are asked to produce reality TV 'with Chinese characteristics', even at the expense of reducing its entertainment value. The phrase 'with Chinese characteristics', as Michael Keane et al. state,

Has become a way of asserting sovereignty in an era that has seen an unprecedented influx of global products, theories and ideologies...its application becomes a normative strategy to ensure that economic reforms do not become automatically associated with an ideological drift towards liberal governance and celebration of a consumer society. (2007:50)

Herein, the censorship of SARFT should be first understood as reaffirming the state's sovereignty. I will come back to this later. As result, a 'positive competition' as a strategy is proposed which advocates the spirit of co-operation, mutual support, wisdom and friendliness. So-called 'Western negative competition' featuring belligerence, selfishness and expediency is strictly censored.

Survival Challenge, produced by Guangdong TV in 2000, was the first Chinese version of the *Survivor* format. In the 1st season (picture 1), three participants were selected from more than 500 candidates. They were required to hike along the borderline of the eight provinces in six months with minimal living materials. Cooperation was featured instead of the competition. In 2001, coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the founding of Communist Party of China, the Red Army's Long March was set as the challenging route of the 2nd season (picture 2). Participants were required to start hiking from Ruijin city (Jiangxi province) to finally arrive in Huining county (Gansu province). As Anthony Fung says, 'Chinese producers even insert political messages within programmes dealing with nationalism, patriotism, national unity and multiculturalism, and in contemporary Chinese media, the combination of soft nationalism and commercial entertainment is not uncommon' (2009:185-6). In season three, an isolated island in the Western Pacific was chosen as the location. By displaying the remote frontier landscape in the first season, the primitive skyline of mountains and rivers in second season and the exotic offshore island in third season, the show focuses on a 'human versus nature' competition⁵⁸, instead of an

⁵⁸ Daniel Bell (1976) states, that post-industrial society, otherwise called consumer society, media society, and high technology society, has interpersonal relationship as its main social concern, rather than the focus on 'human versus nature' in pre-industrial society and industrial society. In this sense, Chinese *Survivor* (which focused on human-nature relation) suggests that China was still mainly in the phase of being an industrial society at that time. Statistics also prove that the development of internet did not start until 2004. When *Big Brother*, *Survivor* formats were transplanted into China in 2000, the

egoistical individual competition (picture3). The show emphasised the determination of the participants while they overcame obstacles of nature along the journey. In other words, it emphasises the rational spirit of man's triumph over nature. As stated in the promotional ad video, 'by using their wisdom and courage, they fight against nature...in the process of which they continuously overcome difficulties, tightly grabs the audience's attention.'

Beijing Vhand Media produced *Step in Shangri-La* in 2001. With only 10 matches and 10-days worth of rations, 18 volunteers were placed in no-man's-land area of Shangri-la, which is more than 4,000 meters above sea level, to live for 30 days. Volunteers were separated into smaller groups and assigned to nearly 20 contests such as mountain climbing, horse racing, treasure hunting, etc. It placed more importance on cooperation and collectivism (Yan Ling and Tian Hao, 2004). The grand prize was replaced with a form of social philanthropic activity, which can be seen as the 'civic purpose' identified by Corner (2002). For Corner, a lack of civic purpose is reality TV's defining attribute. However, this Chinese version of *Survivor* demonstrates the effort of Chinese producers' producing 'do-good' (Ouellette 2008,2010) programme, which attempts to instill in the viewer a value of reaching out and public service. Also, the cameramen were sent to participants' hometown, to record their working, personal life for a month. As Chen Qiang, the planner of the show, claimed in his interview, 'the Western *Survivor* is just a stylised game, but we want to merge the show with sociological and anthropological thinking' (Ran Ruxue and Wu Jing 2001).

In 2004, *Quest USA* was launched by an independent media company. Four teams of young people, from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the mainland and the United States, were arranged to against each other, but in a nice, collaborative way. All the contestants speak Chinese whilst using the American landscape as backdrop and all-purpose obstacle course. As Ted Anthony says, 'it's *The Real World* meets *Kerouac* meets *The Simple Life* 2---in Mandarin, with heavy overtones of politeness and a very Chinese sense of duty and commitment to teamwork.'⁵⁹ After skinning his elbows in a track race against fellow contestants (picture4), a young man declares, 'you bleed and sacrifice for the people.' The Chinese sensibility of cooperation, devotion and seeing the team as the One, not the individual are infused into every episode. Participants who got too aggressively competitive were often admonished by teammates. In short, it is a friendly RTV with 'Chinese characteristics'. Producer Sarah Zhang says, 'the government doesn't want to

Chinese Internet industry was just getting started with only 16.9 million internet users, according to the annual report of China Internet Network Information Center's (CNNIC) in July 2000. By 2005, the number of internet users had reached 100 million. Since then, the Internet industry has maintained its rapid growth, with 298 million users by December 2008, the covering of Internet in China reached 22.6% in 2008, for the first time exceeding the global average 21.9% (CNNIC Report No.23). The accelerated development of Internet explains the fact that the interactive technology of *Big Brother* and *Survivor* was not fully exploited in China until 2005 by a talent show called *Super Girl*.

⁵⁹ Anthony, T.(2004) 'On this Reality TV Show, East Meets West'. *The Washington Post* [online] 25 December. available from

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25152-2004Dec24.html>> [25 December 2004]

promote too much American ideology. They don't want to see too much backstabbing in order to succeed' (ibid). Again, America's individualism is reduced to an unscrupulous, egoistical backstabbing.

As discussed above, the so-called 'negative Western values' are deprecated and diluted. The superiority of communist ideology has been reaffirmed. In addition, the censorship announced by SARFT suggests an intervention into the television market. As Bourdieu argued, neoliberalism advocates a utopia of a pure, perfect market, and aims at 'putting into question all the collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market, especially the nation state' (1998a: 96). Neoliberalism denies the function of the state's intervention in the economy and 'preaches the subordination of the nation state to the demands of economic freedom for the masters of the economy, with the suppression of all regulations on all markets' (ibid: 101). Under its attack, the state's room for manoeuvre is steadily shrinking. Thus, if the deregulation is taken as the neoliberal attempt to weaken national sovereignty, then, SARFT's regulation of the television market can be seen as a declaration of sovereignty. It suggests that SARFT is resisting the market whilst adapting it. Pursuing market economy but also regulating it stands as the contradiction and discomfort for SARFT. However, regulating the market is an obligatory, necessary response. Meanwhile, this response tries to prove that introducing the market as an economic strategy will not necessarily threaten the state's sovereignty. Therefore, it serves to reiterate its legitimacy in the Chinese context.

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Picture 1 Three participants hiking (season one)
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Picture 2 The group setting off (season two)
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Picture 3
The skyline of mountains, with the red flag waving in the wind, on the flag was the name of this show.

Picture 4
John from team Mainland skinned his elbow in the track race.

Contradiction and Discomfort

A Chinese scholar Song Weicai comments, 'the transplanted cultural products are always subject to the local cultural context' (2005:51). As discussed above, the local cultural context of post-Mao China is actually an uncomfortable situation. SARFT's intervention into talent show market demonstrates it more clearly.

Super Girl (picture 5), produced by Hunan satellite TV, and started in 2004 as the first Chinese talent show adopted the *American Idol* format. The 2nd season in 2005 was a spectacular phenomenon with over 120,000 female contestants joining the show. According to the CSM's survey (CCTV-Sofres Media Investigation Company), in 31 cities around the nation, *Super Girl* successfully raised the daytime ratings of Hunan satellite TV from 0.5% to 4.6% and its market share rose from 20%, to 49%. Its ratings were No.2 in its time segment, only after CCTV1 (news channel). In *2006 China Broadcast Television Development Report*, compiled by the Development and Reform Research Centre of SARFT, *Super Girl* received a positive evaluation, 'the success of *Super Girl* drives the cheerful rise of numerous talent shows, such as *Dream China* (CCTV, 2005), *I show* (Shanghai Dragon satellite TV, 2004), etc.'. Such praise represents the government's support for the commercial success of talent shows by siding with the media's marketisation.

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Picture 5 Super Girl, top six contestants in the 2nd season in 2005

In 2006, a research group was assigned by SARFT to evaluate the reality programmes of Shanghai Dragon satellite TV in terms of their economic value. The results came out as *The Industrial Value Chain of Shanghai RTV Report* (Li 2006). In the interview, the research group concludes⁶⁰,

Three talent shows, *Good Boy Go Ahead*, *I Show*, *Dancing Party* and *Wise Man Takes All* (Chinese version of *The Apprentice*) benefited the cooperators in various sectors with over 1.4billion RMB in general. The commercial value of these four programmes reaches 3.845billion RMB. Considering the upstream

⁶⁰ Sina (2006) *Reality TV has significant meaning for the development of culture industry*. [online] available from <<http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2006-12-20/19121379469.html>>[20 December 2006]

and downstream business chain, the total contribution will reach 7.689billion RMB, and is expected to exceed 10billion RMB in the future.

Again, it is the cheering for the market success. Driven by economic return, there were more than 500 similar talent shows on Chinese television screens in 2006.

While talent shows were loudly hailed as a huge success, it started to concern the public that this celebrity-making machine would substantially induce minors into 'fame daydreaming' (pipe dream). Talent shows was accused as being low, hokum, maudlin and focusing on the ratings regardless of its social consequences. Calls for the media's social responsibility began appearing in mainstream newspapers and news reports. Soon after, SARFT announced its first regulatory act. On 12th April 2006, SARFT stated that *Super Girl* in 2006 should be maintained in no more than five cities as its sub-divisions, the activities of these sub-divisions should not be broadcast on provincial satellite TV channels. It stipulated that contestants of the cross-provincial talent show must be over 18 years old. Also, SARFT made requests as follows,

The show should not set the grand prize, and the dress/language of the contestants and the presenters should suit mainstream aesthetic. The show should develop certain public philanthropic activities. The song chosen by the contestants should promote mainstream values: patriotism, the love of the communist party and family. It should reject the maudlin, the vulgar and sensationalised content. It should not focus on achieving high ratings and pander to the audiences' voyeuristic desires.

SARFT especially made the requirements for the organised activities in the show,

To organise activities is to actively reflect EHES⁶¹ as the core of socialist values, firmly establish the overall awareness of responsibility, pay close attention to the public opinion about *Super Girl*, contribute to build a harmonious socialist society. Hunan TV, as the party's apparatus, should always adhere to these principles and insist on the correct guidance of public opinion.

This first round of regulation aimed to emphasis socialist values and control the

⁶¹ EHES was proposed by Hu Jintao in 4th March 2006, it advocates: Honor to those who love the motherland, and shame on those who do harm to her; Honor to those who serve the people, and shame on those who are divorced from them; Honor to those who quest for science, and shame on those who prefer to be ignorant; Honor to those who are hard-working, and shame on those who detest having to work; Honor to those who unite and help people, and shame on those who gain at the expense of others; Honor to those who are honest and trustworthy, and shame on those who forsake good for the sake of gold; Honor to those who are disciplined and law-abiding, and shame on those who violate laws and disciplines; and Honor to those who uphold hard struggle, and shame on those who indulge in a dissipated life.

'daydreaming' of fortune and fame. However, the fertile ground of this daydreaming is the striking economic gap between rich and poor currently in Chinese society and the fact that the state retreats from its socialist responsibility to handle this inequality. *Super Girl*'s nationwide audition with no threshold reflects, what Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1965) called, universalism and freedom. Talent shows, hence, become a virtual Carnival Square built by the media. They offer the audiences an opportunity and the pleasure to freely and equally share 'everything', especial social chances. 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people' (in Morris 1994:198). In the end, the winner realises his/her daydreams by the coronation of a lottery-like fame and fortune. RTV, then, is interpreted as a lottery for celebrity. Participants could gain fame overnight, a chance for fortune, social mobility and career as TV star. However, as P. David Marshall comments, 'the star is part of a system of false promise in the system of capital, which offers the reward of stardom to a random few in order to perpetuate the myth of potential universal success' (1997:9). Additionally, the lottery itself implies economic stratification and social inequality, as Andrejevic argues, 'the start of a three-decade trend of increasing economic inequality coincided with the return of the lottery and its resurgent popularity. Like reality TV, the lottery represents a fast food version of the American dream, thereby serves as compensation for the centralisation and concentration of wealth and power' (2004:68). In this era with increasing economic disparity, everyone is longing for the fate-changing opportunity. During the time of a carnival, people temporarily, symbolically realise their dreams of upward social mobility, changing destiny, owning wealth, rights and freedom by the crowning, wearing masks and other rituals. In this sense, *Super Girl* reveals social crisis, i.e. rich-poor divide, and provides audiences and participants the pleasure of achieving their dreams and releasing tension.

By means of its lottery-like fame and fortune, the talent show, as almost a nationwide carnival, is also reminding people of the striking economic disparity existing between rich and poor in daily life and the socialist state's deviation from egalitarian redistribution. Increasing economic disparity and fierce competition undoubtedly violate the belief in a socialist country which stresses egalitarianism and common wealth. The reality is that this situation cannot be easily remedied due to the introduction of the market economy. Therefore, by regulating and repressing this lottery-like opportunity, it suggests a cover up, or at least, an overlooking of social inequality and social trauma. The regulations are there to control the scale, discourses and influence of these talent shows, to avoid stimulating the audiences' perception of increasing economic stratification, thus, to downplay the social issues. SARFT paradoxically began its regulation of talent shows in the name of social responsibility and programme quality, right after hailing its economic success. It was in fact trying to control the very commercial logic it was cheering for.

Wang Taihua (2007)⁶², general-director of SARFT, stated in a meeting, 'there have been too many talent shows on our screens. Many of them are low-quality, low-brow

⁶² Feuilherade P.(2007) 'China threatens reality TV crackdown'. *BBC News* [online] 16 January. available from<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6263285.stm>> [16 January 2007]

programmes. The government must strengthen its supervision of entertainment shows, particularly talent shows, restrict the number of them and upgrade the quality.⁶³

On 20th September 2007, SARFT supplemented the detailed new regulatory measures, 'Further Management of Talent Shows',

CCTV and all provincial satellite channels should apply for SARFT's approval to organise talent shows and similar activities. Each provincial satellite TV can only organise one talent show each year, with the whole period, including nationwide audition, maintained in two months. With maximum ten times stage show included, each of them should not exceed 90 minutes. Only the finale can be broadcast live. Since 1/10/2007 onwards, all provincial satellite TVs and sub-provincial channels should not broadcast talent shows from 19:30 to 22:30. The presenter's words, judges' comments, contestants' expression, relatives' interview and VCR, etc., the total duration of these should be reduced to maximum 20 percent of the entire duration of the show. The talent competition should occupy a minimum 80 percent of the total duration. In each show featuring singing competition, Chinese songs should account for more than 75 percent. The image of the contestants should suit mainstream aesthetic and be morally sound. The show should display the contestants' fortitude, maturity, confidence, optimistic attitude and self-reliance. The presenter should enhance awareness of social responsibility, not express blatant favouritism and reject any mutual ridiculing, flattering and flirting. Judges and guest hosts should be professional with good social reputation and personal morality, humble attitude and demure look. They shall not have adopted mobile voting, landline telephone voting, Internet voting and other outside stage field voting in any way. No grand prize is allowed. The show would be asked to rectify the issue or even be banned if it broke SARFT's regulation. In a serious situation, approval of the next year's show would also be cancelled.

Obviously, the regulation was intended to change the balance of discourses, reduce the show into a simple talent performance. Because the most sensational part of a talent show is not the songs, but the heartbreaking rendering of the humble contestants' family story. The family story, which maybe about their suffering from poverty, illness or other problems, is told by means of interviewing the contestant or relatives. The same strategy is applied in Western talent shows as well, such as *American's Next Top Model (ANTM)* or *American Idol*. These programmes always choose humble contestants and listen to their story. The happy ending would be a humble contestant who comes from nothing finally winning the title and the prize, therefore, realise the American dream. For example,

⁶³ On 20th January 2007, SARFT demands, 'in at least 8 months from February 2007, all satellite TV channels should broadcast mainstream theme TV series on primetime slot'. Mainstream theme suggests a positive, patriotic product. Since the talent shows had been occupying the primetime for nearly two years, this initiative would undoubtedly affect its living environment.

Brittani in *ANTM* cycle 16, a girl from humble beginning in a trailer park, finally won the title, the prize, the model agency contract and the spread in Italian *Vogue*. In China, it was also epitomised by Shang Wenjie (picture 6,7), the winner of *Super Girl* 2006. As an ordinary university student, she came from humble social origins and finally won the show, which was credited to the enormous votes from her fans. It suggests that the programme has rallied the support of disadvantaged group, especially young, alienated, poor people, 'who recognise themselves in the participants and the situations that are presented on television, which they see as analogous to their own weakened positions in reality' (Frau-Meigs 2006:47). It is the support of the disadvantaged by the disadvantaged. However, with restrictive censorship, talent shows became the castrated Carnivals and almost disappeared throughout 2008 in China. Even Hunan TV, the pioneer station, had to put an end to talent shows in both 2007 and 2008, until the restart in 2009 with *Happy Girl*.

Noticeably, in April 2006, the first regulatory act suggests that the ranking scores of contestants should combine the judgment of the judges with the audiences' SMS voting. However, in the second regulation, besides the detailed regulation on talent show's scale, broadcasting slot and content, the audiences' voting is banned. It says clearly that none of the following should be adopted in any way: mobile voting, landline telephone voting, Internet voting and other outside stage field voting. So, why does the audiences' response have to be banned?

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Picture 6

Shang Wenjie in *Super Girl* 2006

Picture 7

Shang releases an album after winning the show, with a makeover catering to the 'taste' of middle class who has better consuming power.

Market, Democracy and Popular Pleasure

Voting, precisely demonstrates how the television market 'confers a *democratic legitimacy* to the market model by posing in *political* terms, i.e. a referendum' (Bourdieu 1998b: 74). This interactive voting is actually only another rationalised form of audience's consumption, which is interpreted as a commitment to 'democracy' and sold to them as 'empowerment'.

This 'empowerment', or the implementation of voting, is dependent on the marketisation of

an interactive technology including SMS, landline and Internet voting. The interactivity, for which *Big Brother* and *Survivor* are famous, was finally fully exploited by *Super Girl* in 2005 in China, which was credited to the accelerated development of Internet. As Wang Ping, general Director of *Super Girl*, says, 'in 2005, *Super Girl* used all means of communication throughout the whole interactive process' (2006:73). *Super Girl* has its own website, webpage in Hunan TV portal, official news site *Red Net*, and is on more than 10 partners portals, including Sina, Sohu, etc. Viewers can watch the show online, download contestants' clips, discuss the show, leave messages for presenters and contestants, provide personal comment and vote for their favourite contestant. The SMS sent by the viewers even appears on the screen in the programme as rolling subtitles. The successful marketisation of interactive technology in the television market has challenged the state's control of the market. It is the first reason of banning the voting.

Additionally, in *Super Girl*, the audiences are encouraged to choose, vote and speak. It is said that freedom to choose, to buy and sell in the market place is the basic rights of the liberal individual, and therefore leads to democracy. Yet in fact, the audiences are just given a fantasy of living in a free world without authority and hierarchy. It is precisely the hypocritical promise of the global marketisation, and, as Harvey states, 'the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking' (2005:7). Guided by this logic, the global marketisation is interpreted as the normal, natural, and inevitable process towards ultimate democracy, which in fact aims to legitimise a set of free play and shrink the space of the nation state's intervention. Globalisation, as Bourdieu commented, represents the core of neoliberalism and 'is instituted both as inevitable destiny and as political project of universal liberation, as the end-point of a natural evolution and as the civic and ethical ideal that promise political emancipation for the people of all countries, in the name of a postulated connection between democracy and the market' (2003:86).

It needs to be noted that democracy is not so much based upon the mere fact of enfranchisement as upon the power that this delivers to the enfranchised citizen. The entitlement is not the only issue, 'the citizen's meaningful participation in decision making...is what underpins democracy' (Turner 2010:46). Furthermore, the voting of the audiences in *Super Girl* is mostly the mere 'aggregation of preferences' (Matthew Hindman 2009:7) in regard to their favourite performer. It is an imagined connection between the market and democracy being exploited by media firms to push for profits. Nevertheless, there are a number of Chinese intellectuals still strongly influenced by the notion of the relation of the market to democracy. For example, in *Nanfang Daily*, 25 August 2005, Dai Xingwei puts it as follows,

Super Girl is an exotic bloom in the garden of socialist spiritual civilisation. Its blossoming has revolutionary significance, as history will prove. Some so-called experts are conservative. They turn their noses up at everything the popular masses like, and treasure everything that should be swept away by the tide of history. Time will show that those people are on the way out.

Dai's statement first manifests what John Fiske says, 'the dominant ideology of our culture, which sees history as progress, change as inevitable and for the better, which gives high priority to the improvement of material prosperity and which is, finally, capitalist and competitive' (1990:170). Secondly, the success of the market is wrongly interpreted as the achievement of 'socialist spiritual civilisation' pursuing democracy. The masses, who choose in the television market and culture industry, were taken as the electorates who exercise their political entitlement, and therefore have 'revolutionary significance'. It is SARFT's believing in the relation of the market to democracy raises its own unease and leads to its regulatory acts on voting. As I stated earlier, the government would not like to see the economic reforms become 'automatically associated with an ideological drift towards liberal governance' (Keane et al. 2007:50). It does not mean that the Chinese government is against the notion of democracy. It only shows that the government does not welcome the neoliberal, Western democracy, or the autonomous, political-participation democracy pictured by Mouffe (see note 56). The government insists on the democracy with Chinese characteristics, though it is still in the process of improving. It should be seen as showing that the Chinese government is trying to resist neoliberalism, unconsciously and consciously.

Further, Dai's statement suggests the significance of audience pleasure. For Fiske (1991), popular pleasure is always social and political, herein, I argue, voting does carry with it a political meaning. So how should we thoroughly understand voting's political meaning, i.e. its implication of free speaking? The audience voting in RTV should be understood as a form of popular culture defined by Fiske,

Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. ...Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology.

(1991:2)

In the Chinese context, popular voting of talent shows is imagined as a victory over the state, the authority, the privileged and the monopoly, as a chance to express discontent, which produces popular pleasure in this struggle.

Firstly, the carnival of talent show offers a 'temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life' (Bakhtin 1965, in Morris 1994:203), when it is compared with those talent competitions previously organised by CCTV. In those official competitions, the contestants are required to have received professional training. They have to be chosen to join the competition by their affiliations. The talent show, on the contrary, violates these established rules. The privileges of the judges and the standards of evaluation held by the elite class are also abandoned. The audience enters the public sphere, which was long dominated by the elite class, by posting, discussing online or gathering fans to support, attack or even

eliminate one contestant. It provides the audience with an opportunity to temporarily reject the world of repression. Therefore, a sense of subverting the hierarchy⁶⁴ and refusing authority are taken by the audiences as their pleasure of 'evasion and resistance' (Fiske 1991:2). 'It is part of the appeal of the RTV format that it promises its audience that it will provoke and defy authority' (Turner 2010: 55).

However, it would be superficial to picture talent show as only subverting the rules and authority exercised in previous talent competitions. In order to explain the deeper reason of the audiences' discontent, we must consider talent shows within the Chinese context again. As discussed above, the lottery-like opportunity offered by talent shows implies economic stratification and social inequality. The Carnival style voting, especially voting for the talented participants of humble birth, actually reflects the audiences' desire for an egalitarian society, in which, the poor equally share opportunities and social chances with the rich. It could be said to imply an unconscious longing for a communist utopia. Voting, seen as a means of expressing affection, therefore, is not the result of pseudo-democracy, but comes from a desire to express discontent with the centralist government who determinedly introduces the individual-centered market, yet retreats from its responsibility of egalitarian redistribution. It is the fundamental class speaking indirectly to the dominant class. In this sense, the significance of this Carnival style voting lies in its potential to reconnect politics to everyday life. Keeping this in mind, it makes the statement of Anti more distinct. This Internet writer cheers for voting and states, 'we like *Super Girl* because it gives the Chinese people an opportunity to experience the joy of free choice and the odiousness of authoritarian wills.'⁶⁵ Therefore, the voting is taken as being successfully defying the authoritarian state. It needs to be noted that in his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin (1965) assessed that the periodic, subversive Carnival can function as letting off steam, which is necessary and good for stabilising the social order.⁶⁶ However, the centralist government is sensitive and not necessarily entirely appreciative of the function of Carnival as a way of letting off steam.

In the Chinese context, voting, as representing the success of the market, challenges the state's sovereignty and expresses the public's discontent at the authoritarian wills. Therefore, voting was banned.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the regulatory acts transmit the message that the central government reiterates its holding on to sovereignty by intervening in the

⁶⁴ Bakhtin (1965) said, carnival 'marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions...all were considered equal during carnival...a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age...People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations' (in Morris 1994:199).

⁶⁵ Anti (2005) 'An open letter for professor Xu Jiling'. *XICI* [online] 29 August. available from <<http://www.xici.net/b159317/d29970675.htm>> [29 August 2005]

⁶⁶ This is why Xu Jiling says, 'the so-called '*Super Girl* Democracy' is only a populist democracy. History has already proved and will continue to prove that populist democracy is the best disguise for power to achieve its aim' (ibid), because the issue they vote on is nonpolitical, therefore, unimportant.

⁶⁷ Certainly, talent shows offer a complex mixture of pleasures. As the audience would vote for the song or the performance. However, the reason of the voting being banned lies in the reasons discussed above.

television market. Thus, by acting as a means of resisting any weakening of state sovereignty, it defends again the feasibility of the neoliberal market in the Chinese context. Moreover, it downplays the social issues caused by introducing neoliberalism and represses the dissatisfaction of the masses. It is the triples win for the central government.

Conclusion

In RTV such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and various talent shows, their 'reality' amounts to individuals struggling against one another in those constantly imposed artificial competitions, where collaboration is actively repressed, and it exploits 'the affective and supposedly 'inner' aspects of the participants' lives' (Fisher and Gilbert 2013:94). For Fisher, this is another dimension of capitalist realism, whose aim is to naturalise the status quo as 'this is the way things are now' (ibid: 90). However, as discussed above, the sincere collaboration has been actively promoted in the localised Chinese version of *Survivor*. What has been repressed is the intensity of individual competition in both *Survivor* formats and talent shows. It demonstrates that SARFT, as an ISA, is struggling between the socialist and the neoliberal calculation.

Further, tying 'badness' to the West means that the Lacanian Thing, the very antagonism, which 'forever prevents the closure of the society in a harmonious, transparent, rational Whole' (Žižek 1994a:22), has been given body and symbolised as 'Western negative values' in the socialist discourses. The capitalist values are referred to as the reason to cause the inconsistency of the society, the disharmony, instability and decadency. Most importantly, it can be identified and eliminated. Therefore, the struggle between capitalist values and communist values replaces the renewed class struggle indicated by the antagonism between rich and poor.

Motivated by this, localisation, or 'purification', has been highlighted during the development of Chinese *Survivor* and talent shows. SARFT advocates 'the programmes of demonstration of talent or sports competition with the participation of the masses'.⁶⁸ It is only mild, freely participated personal performances or obstacle tackling challenges that are appreciated. The group, within which any egoistical behavior emerges, is ruled out. As a result, the show's reflection on social reality is erased as well. The participation of the masses is only maintained as a strategy to exploit the audience's free labour and reduce production costs.⁶⁹ In addition, without the coronation of the lottery-like fortune, the social

⁶⁸ Early 2009, SARFT announced '20 recommended television formats in 2008', including Guangxi satellite TV, *Golden Stage* (singing talent show), Jiangsu satellite TV, *Great Master and Talented Student* (singing talent show), Fujian South-East satellite TV, *Happy100--Magic Competition* (obstacle-tackling competition), Anhui satellite TV, *Theater Stage* (singing talent show), Hunan satellite TV, *Brave Race* (obstacle-tackling competition), Zhejiang satellite TV, *I Love Lyric* (singing talent show). Instead of calling these six programmes reality TV, they were unified under the named of 'the programme of talents demonstration or sports competition with the participation of the mass'.

HunanTV (2009) *Brave Race is listed as 'national recommended show'*. [online] available from <<http://ent.hunantv.com/z/20090202/185137.html>> [3 February 2009]

⁶⁹ It blurs the boundaries between production and consumption, and rationalises consumption at the

issues, such as the unfair redistribution and increasing economic disparity, is downplayed. Without the voting and speaking of the masses, the idea of 'provoking and defying authority' has nowhere to manifest itself in the performance-only stage. Also, the cultural identities presented or produced by talent shows are more 'politically correct'.

The competition of the 2010 *China's Got Talent* (Shanghai Dragon TV, 2010--) was won by Liu Wei (picture 8), a piano player who lost his arms in an accident at age 10. He won with his performance of James Blunt's *You're Beautiful*, played using his feet. The disabled image of Liu Wei is taken as an icon of fortitude, self-improvement and self-confidence. In 2012, *The Voice of China* (TVC), produced by Zhejiang TV, became a new hit. In the first season, the judge Liu Huan, a famous male singer, evaluates the Yi ethnic group contestant, Jike Junyi (picture 9), 'the feeling of singing English songs is grafted on to the singing of Chinese folk songs...This is really the way towards internationalisation. We are presenting our own music, using a way that is widespread and popular around the world.' This comment represents a metaphor for the current China and its dream.⁷⁰ Momo Wu (picture 10), a very stylised, funky looking young girl who is good at English songs, is described as modern icon. Finally, Liang Bo (picture 11), a 22 years old young man, a rock and roll devotee but friendly university student, won the title by singing the song *I love you, China*, a song about patriotism. The third season in 2014 highlights the notion of national unity, promulgates the concept of 'Chinese nation' by picking up the contestants from the ethnic minority, the rural area, Hong Kong, Taiwan, even Chinese in Malaysia to join the show. Additionally, the family stories of suffering from hardship are told by the participants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. In the eyes of mainlanders, people from Taiwan and Hong Kong used to be richer. The stories of poor families from these places would make mainlanders feel much more at ease with the reality of rich-poor divide and economic inequality. Noticeably, it also proves the universal obverse consequence of the global advance of the neoliberal market.

SARFT promotes the CCTV market, but also intervenes in it with an intention to reaffirm sovereignty and socialist superiority. Moreover, the intervention perversely downplays social issues, which rationalises the imperfection with the notion of historical progressivism. Such intervention eventually defends the legitimacy of the neoliberal market in the Chinese context. In the following regulation of CCTV, socialist values and morality have been emphasised and employed. However, facing the market as an ideology in-and-for itself, is it powerful enough, or would it unexpectedly deepen the cynicism? This will be discussed in the next chapter.

same time (Andrejevic 2004:90).

⁷⁰ More discussion on this will be carried out in Chapter 6.

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Picture 8

Liu Wei plays piano with his toes.

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Picture 9 Jike Junyi

The second runner-up of *TVC* in 2012

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Picture 10 Momo Wu

The runner-up of *TVC* in 2012

Picture 11 Liang Bo

The winner of *TVC* in 2012

Chapter Four

Revelation of Chinese RTV and Cynicism

'This is the way things are now.'----Mark Fisher (2013:90)

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the market threatens the state's sovereignty. For the rest of society, the market also impacts on every nook and cranny of their daily lives. The people are stimulated by the economic growth induced by market conditions, but they have also been compelled to digest the stark social divisions and insecurity introduced as its obverse consequence. The contradiction between neoliberal and socialist ideology is experienced as an inevitable and daunting challenge, which entails a constant negotiation aiming for a temporary consensus. As Hall explained, 'in modern societies, hegemony must be constructed, contested and won on many different sites, as the structures of the modern state and society complexify and the points of social antagonism proliferate' (1988a: 168). In this sense, CRTV can be seen as one of the sites for winning cultural hegemony, especially when an arena, which was once entrusted to the tradition regulated moral sphere, is opened up as a new market by dating shows, for example the Chinese version of *Take Me Out*. This time, SARFT not only regulates certain content, but also demands the imposition of more socialist values and morality ('value' and 'morality' having been 'appropriated' by master signifier of socialism), which, I argue, demonstrates the continual effort of seeking a solution for maintaining the legitimacy of the neoliberal market.

This chapter juxtaposes two programmes, *If You Are the One (IYAO)*⁷¹ and *The Exchange Programme (TEP)*⁷², to clarify how regulation and negotiation happen respectively in these two programmes, how both of them actually indicate the same social trauma in different ways, which are induced by rich-poor divide as the consequence of introducing the neoliberal market. In *IYAO*, the social trauma is dramatised through the materialistic discourse of young women, whilst in *TEP*, it is the bringing of a rural youth to experience city life that reminds the audience of their own similar experience, therefore,

⁷¹ *If You Are the One*, the Chinese version of *Take Me Out*, has been produced and broadcast by Jiangsu satellite TV since January 2010. It was once the most popular reality programme through 2010 and 2011. Following its success, Zhejiang satellite TV immediately joined the market competition by producing *Go for Love*, aired from 28th May to 9th June, everyday at 7:35pm. Hunan satellite TV has also started airing *Let's Go on a Date* at a similar period since then.

⁷² *TEP* takes as its backdrop the rural-urban divide in Post-Mao China, juxtaposes urban and rural youth by arranging for them to experience the life of their counterpart for seven days. It was once praised as a new style documentary, as it applies the documentary making skill and records youth participants' activities for 24hours and 7days during their staying in their counterpart's home. It was on air from 4th September 2006 to 29th April 2008, through season one to season four. After a three year interval, it re-started with season five on 4th January 2012, season six and seven in 2013, season eight in 2014.

the audience is thrown into the memory of personal turmoil. The rich-poor divide reflects the economic structures of class inequality, and becomes the trope of the reconstituted capitalist and working class in the Chinese context. In order to conceal the 'traumatic social split' (Žižek 1994a) and calm the social trauma, *IYAO* and other dating shows are demanded by SARFT to 'rectify and improve' themselves by imposing socialist morality. *TEP*, on the other hand, successfully holds on to the design of bringing rural youth to experience city life, which reaffirms the necessity of neoliberal urbanisation. I argue, the discourses in these shows actually suggest, at certain level, that a communal anxiety and insecurity is looking for a channel to express itself. The programmes therefore reveal social trauma and personal turmoil. However, they also try to make it 'right' by imposing socialist morality (*IYAO*) or repress it by enduring it as inevitable (*TEP*). Unexpectedly, these two programmes together deepen a cynicism about the market-driven neoliberal urbanisation and contribute to a 'capitalist realism', which is 'acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action' (Fisher 2009:16) and convinces people that 'this is the way things are now' (Fisher and Gilbert 2013:90).

In order to understand the formation of negotiated consensus, it is important to read discourses from different positions, such as the state, the producers, the intellectuals, the participants and the audiences, and to consider the two programmes together regarding their impact on society. The aim of negotiation is to maintain the legitimacy of the neoliberal market-centred urbanisation, and the regulation demonstrates that the central government tries to regulate the cruelty and consequence of market economy by employing socialist values, such as EHES. As discussed in Chapter 1, EHES is believed to demonstrate clear boundaries between right and wrong, good and bad, as a way of dealing with money worshiping, hedonism, dishonesty, fraud, forsaking good for the sake of gold, gaining personal benefit at the expense of the public, and other social hazards. It is expected to provide basic values and behavioural norms for the entire society and to ensure the healthy development of market economy. However, this chapter might come to a very different conclusion by indicating the formation of cynicism. In order to do so, this chapter firstly shows how *IYAO* calms social anxiety caused by advancing neoliberalism; and secondly, analyses how *TEP* reaffirms the inevitability of neoliberal urbanisation and downplays personal turmoil.

Dating and Money Worship

As Skeggs states, 'the capitalist dynamic in a neoliberal economy knows no boundaries in the search for new markets' (2005:969). When SARFT cracked down on the so-called vulgar talent shows, all satellite TV channels were keen to open a new nationwide market by finding a new RTV format. Blind dating was chosen as it was a pervasive social activity, involving most of the Chinese young generation and their parents. It guarantees an appeal to the largest number of consumers. Additionally, personal relationships and life stories are raw materials of dramatisation. It is an arena that was once entrusted to the tradition regulated moral sphere, but now has been largely impacted by competitive and possessive individualism. Based on this calculation, Jiangsu satellite TV produced *IYAO* (2010--)(picture 12), the first Chinese version of *Take Me Out*. It has gained great

popularity in China since it first aired on 15th January 2010. Every Saturday and Sunday evening, 24 young single women are presented on the stage, and five eligible bachelors come out one by one to try to impress the girls and win a date.

At first, it seems as if the men have more choice facing 24 single women, however, in reality, it is the reverse of this representation. China's past 35 years of the one-child policy since 1978 and the popular of ultrasonic diagnosis B have caused a disproportionate number of families to abort female fetuses in the hope of having a son. By 2010, men outnumber women by approximately 34million as indicated by the gender ratio reported by the 6th national census.⁷³ The imbalance of the gender ratio apparently puts the women in a position of power, which is a different experience for a traditionally patriarchal society. The next question is the criterion for choosing the right suitor in this 'new era'. In the show, the introduction videos of the suitors are always stamped with 'owns car, house' (or the unfortunate opposite) on the bottom half of the screen. It is the explicit demonstration of the possessive individualism. It is one's possessions that determine how he/she views himself/herself and others. It suggests that, in big cities, due to the introduction of the neoliberal market economy, this new generation born after 1980 is largely influenced by the practice of competitive-individualism and the idea of possessive-individualism. Money becomes the embodiment of wealth and possession, and this is very apparent in the marriage process. The charisma of a suitor seems to be secretly determined by the number in his bank account. Naturally, the courtship tends to focus on financial matters, where the decision is just the result of careful mathematics. Sense and sensibility in the courtship is reduced to sense and simplicity, which is in accordance with the rationality of market calculation.

The result is, on the stage, after being subjected to abrasive questioning, many suitors are ruthlessly rejected by these girls and their materialistic discourses. The public embarrassment of these suitors challenges the patriarchal order of this society and leads to a controversy. Nevertheless, one thing we must understand is, what is publicly dramatically presented on the stage is indeed what happens in daily life in a more subtle, tactful way. *IYAO* reveals social reality. As Yan Mu, one of the founders of Baihe.com, an online dating service with 21 million registered users, says, 'audiences like the show because it is honest and demonstrate reality in present day China' (Time 2010).⁷⁴ A 48-year-old netizen, Du Shibin, also comments, 'who doesn't ask about houses and cars these days when looking for someone to marry?' (The New York Times 2010).⁷⁵ Gu Jun, associate professor of Shanghai University, comments, 'the programmes reflect what

⁷³ Baidu Baike (2014) *China Population Census 2010*. [online] available from http://baike.baidu.com/view/2426392.htm?from_id=5069655&dtype=syn&fromtitle=第六次人口普查&fr=aladdin#8_1 [21 November 2014]

⁷⁴ Bergman, J. (2010) 'China's TV Dating Shows: For Love or Money?'. *Time* [online] 30 June. available from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2000558,00.html> [30 June 2010]

⁷⁵ Yang Xiyun. (2010) 'China's Censors Rein in 'Vulgar' Reality TV Show'. *The New York Times* [online] 18 July. available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/19/world/asia/19chinatv.html?pagewanted=1&r=3> [18 July 2010]

is happening in this society, ask girls, how many of them would like to sit and laugh on the backseat of a bicycle?'(Sina 2010).⁷⁶ Additionally, the commercial advertisements of Hangzhou Bank might just epitomise the phenomenon of overvaluing money in daily life. In one ad, a suitor is proposing to a girl with an apartment key put in a jewel box instead of a diamond ring. In another ad, a young couple are picking the furniture for their marital apartment. They were not satisfied with all different styles until they saw an entire set of *fully imported* modern furniture.⁷⁷ It is a society that advocates blatantly 'property ownership' and a materialistic and Western lifestyle as the necessary backdrop for marriage. It suggests again the influence of the market and possessive individualism. The market is extremely powerful because it impacts on people and reproduces its doctrine via a series of apparently non-ideological practices which indicate 'the elusive network of implicit, quasi-'spontaneous' presuppositions and attitudes' (Zizek 1994a:14), therefore, it is an extra-ideological coercion. For example, in the market, people understand that money is just the equivalent of commodity, serve as means of exchange, but in their practice, money becomes the embodiment of wealth, an indestructible and immutable sublime object 'exempted from the effects of wear and tear, which is always sustained by the guarantee of some symbolic authority' (Zizek 1989:13). People understand that value in itself is abstract and does not exist, however, in his practice of exchange in the market, 'he acts as if the particular things (the commodities) were just so many embodiments of universal Value' (ibid: 29). It is the inverse of use value and value, the universal and the particular. Following these unconscious illusions, people pursue commodities, money, and capital without stopping.

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Picture 12

If You Are the One

Picture 13

Ma Nuo, 'I'd rather cry in a BMW'(subtitle).

Nevertheless, the witty girls in the show who just follow the norms of daily life or try to 'reject him, but in a creative way'⁷⁸ are dogmatically categorised as gold diggers. To give a flavour, here are some examples of typical discourses from /YAO:

a) Ma Nuo (picture 13), a 20-year-old model from Beijing, rejected an offer from a suitor to

⁷⁶ Sina (2010) *The Presenters Criticize the Dating Shows on The Shanghai TV Festival*. [Online] available from <<http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2010-06-09/12202982579.shtml>>[9 June 2010]

⁷⁷ The catch of both ads is, they have no problem with money because of the mortgage loan offered by Hangzhou Bank.

⁷⁸ Said by Ma Nuo, when she was under the pressure and apologised to the public.

take a ride on his bike, 'I'd rather cry in a BMW car than laugh on the backseat of a bicycle,' Ma told her suitor with a giggle (17th January 2010, 3rd episode) and she soon was nicknamed as 'BMW Lady'.

b) Another conversation between her and one suitor started with her asking, 'are you rich?' The suitor directly answered, 'my family owns a factory and we have three apartments in Shanghai.'

c) Zhu Zhenfang, a 22-year-old sales assistant, also caused a stir when she refused to shake hands with a suitor, 'only my boyfriend gets to hold my hand. Everyone else, must pay 200,000 RMB [£20,000] for the privilege.' 'Why 200,000 RMB?' She continued, 'because my basic criteria for my future boyfriend is that he must earn this amount of money each month.' (18th April 2010, 20th episode)

It is true that these discourses represent an extreme reaction against socialist values and a stark engagement with values of capitalism. However, there is more than meets the eye. Neither can we dogmatically label these girls as gold diggers, as they just say as it is in the daily life. Also presumably, they are encouraged to say so by the production team. For a girl, knowing the suitor's economic condition, such as property, occupation, annual salary, is pretty normal for an arranged blind date. Yet, information like that is usually collected through a dating service, such as Baihe.com, or an intermediary. Gu Xiaoming, professor from Shanghai Fudan University, states, 'these speeches in the shows are in fact telling the truth...plenty of people who criticize the show actually understand what those participants were saying, but they need to show their nobility in public' (Sina 2010).⁷⁹ It suggests that immorality is condensed onto the girls and their discourses, enabling some critics to revel in his self-righteous disgusted response. However, 'disgust is simultaneously about *desire and* revulsion' (Skeggs 2005:971), which explains why Gu Xiaoming observes, 'I might say, deep down in my mind, there is a desire to want somebody else (the girls) to say something that I am afraid to express' (Sina 2010).

Approximately 15 years ago, people usually did not worry about a house in a marriage, because it is provided by the state or the SOE where they work. The traditional values of marriage therefore mainly emphasise love. However, house distribution, as one of the guarantees in a socialist state, has been replaced by a real estate market. Many urban young people, without the benefits of wealthy parents, are being priced out of owning their own homes. China is increasingly becoming divided between tribes of haves and have-nots. In current times, people seek marital security guaranteed by money and home ownership whilst the state no longer provides it, but this behaviour is seen as materialistic in the view of the traditional values of marriage. That is why we see people taking the moral high ground to criticize these girls. It indicates that Chinese people are suffering from facing an ideological contradiction between neoliberal and traditional ideas and rarely have chance to express their feelings. As a contributor, *SusAn*, comments, 'on the

⁷⁹ See note 76.

stage they say a lot of things that people only dare to say in their dreams' (CNN 2011).⁸⁰ Herein, these materialistic discourses are more like a way of letting off steam. A netizen on Sohu.com writes, 'you can see the show as a reflection of our society, we like watching, because the conflicts in daily life are super sized on the stage' (ibid). Therefore, what we see here is the contradiction between the values being promoted and the rejection of those values when shown in a CRTV.

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Picture 14 Liu Yunchao

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Picture 15 Jaguar bro

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Picture 16 Shen's mother says in her interview, 'we don't want rural girls' (subtitle).

Picture 17 Shen Yong is introducing himself.

Additionally, a patronising attitude towards the poor and the rural people appears on the stage. For example, Liu Yunchao (picture 14), a 23-year-old boy, comes from a rich family and is labelled as a member of the 'second rich generation'. He brags on the stage about having 6 million RMB [£600,000] in the bank and three sports cars (17th March 2010). This is a good example of the nouveau riche bragging about wealth. He is condemned in the blogosphere for his arrogance. Interestingly, in another dating show *Go for Love*,⁸¹ an average looking, 5'3ft businessman from Wenzhou city also brags about his diamond ring, newly furnished apartment in Hangzhou city center and shows the key to his Lamborghini SpA. This man, nicknamed 'Jaguar bro' (picture 15), even boldly says,

⁸⁰ Zhao Xing (2011) 'Dating TV in China: 'Don't talk to me unless you're rich'. *CNN International* [online] 11 June. available from <<http://www.cnn.com/shanghai/life/reality-tv-comes-china-dont-talk-me-unless-youre-rich-656443>>[11 June 2011]

⁸¹ Another copy of *Take Me Out*, produced by Zhejiang satellite TV.

'girls, let me tell you, don't marry a guy who can't give you a five carat diamond ring' (in episodes on 31st May and 1st June 2010). The most striking scene appeared in *IYAO* on 11th April 2010⁸². A mother (picture16) of a suitor Shen Yong (picture17) said in front of the camera, 'we don't want girls who come from the rural area.' It aroused fierce reaction amongst the girls on the stage. A girl Yuan Yuan immediately hotly asked her, 'how dare you disdain the peasants? This studio you stand in right now, the house you live in and the food you eat, they are all produced by the peasants! The agro-land is not dirty, the peasants live on their labour, there is no disgrace!' Another girl Liu Wenjing angrily responded, 'look at your family history, you might just find out that your ancestor generations were peasants!' The presenter Meng Fei added, 'three generations ago, all of the Chinese were peasants!' It is the antagonism between rich and poor, urban and rural being spoken out loud on the stage.

As discussed in Chapter 1, whilst China celebrates the great economic achievements of the market-oriented reform, the price is increasing economic disparity. It suggests an uneven and unfair redistribution over the past 36 years, which is against the socialist belief in egalitarianism and the common-wealth. While a minority of managers and entrepreneurs rapidly accumulate wealth, the benefits of a generation of workers and peasants are sacrificed. Additionally, the backlash among the young generation, as demonstrated in these dating shows, is especially severe, reflecting growing anxieties over the widening gap between rich and poor, and shifting social values. I argue, the overvaluing of money and materialistic discourses actually suggest that social anxiety, agony, and anger are looking for an exit. As Hall and O'Shea argued, 'the *structural* consequences of neoliberalism ----the individualisation of everyone, the privatisation of public troubles and the requirement to make competitive choices at every turn----has been paralleled by an upsurge in feelings of insecurity, anxiety, stress and depression' (2013:12).

In an era of growing economic polarisation and individual competition, real estate, bank savings, luxury car, etc., are all symbols of high social status and the guarantee of a secure life. Enjoying material comfort no longer symbolises potential decadence, instead, it is a security manifested in possessing commodities. Because, as Bourdieu stated, 'the state has withdrawn, is withdrawing, from a number of sectors of social life for which it was previously responsible' (1998a: 2), such as housing, schooling, health caring, etc. The state no longer supports the less fortunate or powerful in a society. For some girls, due to their disadvantaged positions in this competition-centered patriarchal society, seeking life guarantee by means of marriage is probably the quickest way.⁸³ As Zhu Zhenfang (picture 18) says in her interview, 'you don't know how it is if you had never been poor. I do need money, I can't support my family on my own, I want to change my fate' (Baidu Baike

⁸² Sina. video clip of *IYAO*, [online] available from
<<http://video.sina.com.cn/v/b/31685788-1589192531.html>>

⁸³ Other possible approaches include lottery-like fame and fortune in reality talent shows, as discussed in previous chapter.

2013).⁸⁴ This girl is also praised by her colleagues as a hard working, self-reliant, filial daughter, 'she barely buys clothes, that is not easy for a girl! She sends back almost 80% of her annual salary to her hometown. A few years ago, when her father was very ill and in need of a huge medical expense, she kept it to herself alone until she had to borrow money from us' (ibid). It is the lack of social security and the turmoil caused by it that results in her apparent overvaluation of money. In addition, it suggests a communal anxiety and a communal desire for security, because the situation and experience like hers are not uncommon in this society with its growing economic disparity.

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Picture 18 Zhu Zhenfang

Picture 19 Psychologist Le Jia as the guest host.

Another so-called gold digger, Ma Nuo, also reveals her inner thoughts and living conditions in an interview. She says, 'a lot of people are unreliable in this society. I want to have my own money. Spending other's money makes me feel weak, I'd like to earn my money, it makes me feel strong and independent' (Baidu Baike 2015)⁸⁵ It suggests a feeling of distrust for other people. This feeling is 'in itself highly desirable from the perspective of the neoliberal project. The erosion of confidence, the sense of being alone, in competition with others: this weakens the worker's resolve, undermines their capacity for solidarity, and forestalls militancy' (Fisher 2013:93). Besides, the state is now there 'to help individuals themselves to provide for all their social needs---health, education, environmental, travel, housing, parenting, security in unemployment, pensions in old age, etc.' (Hall 2003:18). Whilst the state retreats from its social responsibility, the neoliberal idea of self-reliance has impacted greatly on people and their life in many aspects. It also explains why *IYAO* invites a psychologist, Le Jia (picture 19), as its guest host to interpret the participants' personalities. The anxiety and the social problems are concealed and perceived in terms of psychological dispositions: as personal characters, personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, neuroses, which means that the focus becomes individual rather than a part of state ideology. Poverty is seen as being caused by personal attributes. It covers the state's retreat and emphasises the neoliberal ideas of self-responsibility, self-help, and self-reliance. As Ulrich Beck states, 'social crises appear as individual

⁸⁴ Baidu Baike (2013) *Zhu Zhenfang*. [online] available from
<<http://baike.baidu.com/view/3501407.htm>>[22 December 2013]

⁸⁵ Baidu Baike (2015) *Ma Nuo*. [online] available from
<<http://baike.baidu.com/subview/2001967/15345453.htm>>[4 January 2015]

crises, which are no longer (or are only very indirectly) perceived in terms of their rootedness in the social realm. This is one of the explanations for the current revival of interest in psychology [Pschowelle]' (1992:100).

Happy Rubik, Chinese version of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*⁸⁶, invites psychologists as guest hosts as well. The show deals with problems such as relationship, domestic dispute where money issues are often involved.⁸⁷ In each episode, the production team invites the various parties involved to come to the studio, and tries to solve their problem through communication and confirms repeatedly that 'money can't buy you happiness'. For instance, a boy's proposal is rejected by the girl's parents, as the boy cannot afford a big house in Shanghai. The presenter then insists that love has priority over other things, renting a house is an affordable, acceptable solution. However, a big house, in the eyes of a girl's parents, is the symbol of a secure life in this society full of uncertainty and insecurity. The production team tries to integrate social norms, cultural values and moral standards through the show to carry out a moral education. It also invites a psychologist into each episode to interpret, comfort and communicate with the different parties. The social problems once again are increasingly perceived in terms of psychological dispositions: as personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, anxieties, conflicts and neuroses, the focus becomes individual again. However, it is a mistake to simply impose individual ethical responsibility. The capitalist system is precisely using ethics in order to protect itself----'the blame will be put on supposedly pathological individuals, those 'abusing the system', rather than on the system itself' (Fisher 2009:69).

These dating shows are like an exaggerated, over determined version of society, with the materialistic discourses deliberately dramatised by the producers. As Ma Nuo points out, 'the producer has played up my words for sensationalism and publicity.' Zhu Zhenfang doubts, 'sometimes I feel like that they (the editor, the producer) have already dug a trap for me to jump.' Shen's mother also says, 'television set me up, a female journalist asked me directly, 'would you like a girl from the rural area? or a model?' how I should answer...I was just telling the truth.' Again, the 'truth' is the problem between rich and poor in daily life. When money or property is highlighted as the biggest power, or when a representative of the nouveau riche boasts about his advantage and openly rejects the poor, it would, without doubt, offend the majority, vulnerable groups such as the rural group and unemployed workers. It is a 'very social antagonism' (Zizek 1994a:22) between rich and poor defined this stage as a social traumatic split.⁸⁸ Therefore, *IYAO* got criticized by the official media and regulated by SARFT, because it reveals the rich-poor divide and offends the poor, which is even dramatised through the materialistic discourses.

⁸⁶ It is produced by Shanghai Dragon satellite TV since January 2010 through 2011.

⁸⁷ In the interviews with me at Shanghai, March 2011, the producer Xu Zhenhuan compares three similar programmes in this way, '*The Mortal World* is talking about a house worth 100,000RMB [£10,000], *The Old Uncle* is about a house worth 400,000RMB [£40,000], and *Happy Rubik* is telling the story about a house worth 1million RMB [£100,000].'

⁸⁸ It is the Lacanian 'Real' which has 'essentially traumatic quality' (Evans 1996:160).

Official Critique and Regulation

At the beginning of June 2010, a triumvirate of news organisations run by CPC: *Xinhua News Agency*, *The People's Daily* and *China Central Television* (CCTV) simultaneously ran reports lambasting the dating shows and their materialistic discourses. On 11th June, *Focus Interview* (CCTV) put out a report with the title *Bring Healthy Development to Dating Television*. For 11 minutes, it castigated dating shows for 'promoting materialistic and incorrect values, openly discussing sexual matters and fabricating stories, thus hurting the credibility of media.' Zhu Hong, a spokesman of SARFT, told CCTV in his interview,

In this situation, if we did not correct it, it would have a negative influence on the entire society, misleading young people to take 'money' as their only goal. Lots of audiences have said on the web, 'You have to control this!' we should guide our young people with the true, the nice and the beautiful; let the programmes serve society better.' (The New York Times 2010)⁸⁹

It seems like 'the entire society' has agreed on the 'correct' values and SARFT's regulatory acts, 'by asserting that popular opinion *already agrees*, they hopes to produce agreement *as an effect*. This is the circular strategy of the self-fulfilling prophecy' (Hall and O'Shea 2013:8). It attempts to shape and influence public opinion in the favor of SARFT, receiving some responses. For example, scholar Ding Jiayong comments, 'the dating shows can function as a forum for debating values, but it can't become a site to disseminate non-mainstream values' (QQ News 2010).⁹⁰ A Sohu user writes, 'I believe that the majority of people respect honesty and true love, although there are many people worshipping money in their daily life, and these shows are playing with people's minds and misleading the whole value of society' (CNN 2011).⁹¹ In the article, *Eight Sins of Dating Shows*⁹², published by *Xinhua News Agency*, the dating shows were slated as 'advocating

⁸⁹ Yang Xiyun. (2010) 'China's Censors Rein in 'Vulgar' Reality TV Show'. *The New York Times* [online] 18 July. available from

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/19/world/asia/19chinatv.html?pagewanted=1and_r=3>[18 July 2010]

⁹⁰ QQ News (2010) *SARFT Regulates If You Are the One and other Dating Shows*. [online] available from <<http://news.qq.com/a/20100612/002005.htm>> [12 June 2010]

⁹¹ Zhao Xing (2011) 'Dating TV in China: 'Don't talk to me unless you're rich'. *CNN International* [online] 11 June. available from<<http://www.cnn.com/shanghai/life/reality-tv-comes-china-dont-talk-me-unless-youre-rich-656443>>[11June 2011]

⁹² In this article, *Eight Sins were listed as follows*:

1. mutually copying format between different television networks;
2. advocating money-worshipping, hedonism and neglecting affective communication;
3. blindly pursuing the ratings;
4. using actresses as participants to provide a sensational performance or false story;
5. spreading scandals;
6. encouraging language abuse;
7. degrading the true, the kind and the beautiful, and the social moral standards;
8. lacking true love.

money-worshipping, hedonism and neglecting affective communication.'

On 12th June, *The People's Daily* published an article *Cannot Sacrifice Social Responsibility for Ratings*, and an article from its commentator *Advocating a Fresh Clean-up of TV Screen*. The two articles both slated the dating shows for deviating from Socialist Core Value System. The editor of *The Weekly Times*, Xie Yong agrees that these materialistic discourses show no respect for traditional values, culture and loyalty. However, in his column on Sohu.com, he also states that none of these values are really below the average values of Chinese society at present, 'the women who appear on the shows have low tastes, but how can a country of tainted milk, drainage oil cooking, vaccine failures and fake history (television series) produce real princesses?' (CNN 2011).⁹³ The doctrine of market competition, possessive individualism, and social Darwinism have been infiltrating into a vast range of activities in daily life, which alienate people and their moral standards and values. The market, as an extra ideological coercion, pushes people to pursue money and compromise traditional values, leading to a materialistic attitude. However, social crisis like this is now represented as condensing onto the women and their 'money worshipping' discourses. The women, therefore, are cast in the role of scapegoat; they are unfairly marked as 'bad selves', who, as Skeggs says, are 'the limit to national propriety' (2005:968). It denies the fact that women have been victims all the time, no matter as being a prey previously or as a predator nowadays. In a patriarchal society, when the state retreats from its social welfare policies and promotes the neoliberal logic of self-reliance, women are seeking a life guarantee due to their disadvantaged positions, their materialistic discourses should be understood as the expression of their trauma.

Nevertheless, regulation is inescapable. For the socialist ideology, money worshipping represents the aggressive instinct of the market order; therefore, it needs to be severely controlled. Additionally, 'money can't buy you happiness', as representing mainstream values, appears again as a common-sense assertion and functions the same as another common-sense assertion of 'happiness consists in contentment' (count your blessings). It aims to comfort the disadvantaged group, while concealing their needs at the same time. Finally, it serves to maintain the social order and the ideological authority and leadership---of intellectual and moral ascendancy. In this sense, the dating show becomes a forum of civil society, for a discursive formation of the 'proper' outlook on love and marriage. The civil society is the key site for shaping consensus 'with a remarkable durability, depth, and staying power because the adhesion it wins among the people is not coerced, as it might be if the state were directly involved, but appears to be produced freely and spontaneously as the popular consent to power' (Hall 1988:48).

The new policies were announced on 9th June 2010.⁹⁴ *Go for Love* was cancelled. *IYAO*

⁹³ Zhao Xing (2011) 'Dating TV in China: 'Don't talk to me unless you're rich'. *CNN International* [online] 11 June. available from <<http://www.cnn.com/shanghai/life/reality-tv-comes-china-dont-talk-me-unless-youre-rich-656443>>[11 June 2011]

⁹⁴ SARFT issued a set of new rules for dating show and love and life story show. 1. It demanded that

paused its recording. The earlier recorded programmes were re-edited and placed under careful inspections before going on air. The producer Wang Gang sighed in his Weibo (Chinese Twitter), 'it is painful! There are six inspections before the show goes on air' (19th June 2010). /YAO started to record new episodes by the end of June, with a focus on highlighting the resonant themes of socialism---love, family, duty, moral standards, traditionalism, and patriarchy. As said in a news report, 'gone are fast cars, luxury apartments and boasts of flush bank accounts. Now the contestants entice each other with tales of civic service and promises of good relations with future mothers-in-law' (The New York Times 2010).⁹⁵ It suggests that women are asked to play a traditional image of femininity by expressing domesticity, submissiveness, and the longing for love and marriage. Moreover, the show invited a second guest host, Huang Han (picture 20), a mild-mannered psychologist and professor from the School of Jiangsu Provincial Communist Party Committee. As the representative, she speaks the socialist values. In order to show the media's concern for the disadvantaged groups, the show particularly produced three episodes for the migrant peasant workers, respectively on 17th, 25th July and 1st August. Reeling from controversy and criticism, Ma Nuo, as the representative of so-called 'gold diggers', apologised to the public. She cried and denied in an interview that she overvalues money, 'I only wanted to reject him, but in a creative way...I am actually a self-reliant girl who works full-time every summer holiday. I have realised that some of my words were inappropriate and had a bad impact on society. I apologise to the national audience' (picture 21).

The socialist values and the discourse of 'money can't buy you happiness' are mobilised to placate the poor. The materialistic discourses, which actually express the social trauma, are vetted, controlled and weakened. The regulation represses the audiences' pleasure, as they take the dating show as a cathartic channel to express their anxiety accumulated in daily lives, to 'say a lot of things that people only dare to say in their dreams'. Le Jia, the guest host, writes on his Blog, 'since episode 35, everyone becomes a well-behaved

participants undergo stricter procedures to verify their identities, 'the participant's identity should be carefully verified. The forged identity is strictly prohibited'. SARFT required that the programme should not pick only actresses, models, affluent second generations to be on screen. 'Do not invite people who are holding incorrect or non-mainstream values'. Meanwhile, participant who aroused negative comments should not be invited on the show again. 2. It said that incorrect values about love such as money worship should not be presented or sensationalised in the shows as well as the salacious entertainment. The live broadcast is not allowed and the examining system prior to broadcast should be strictly applied, any wrong opinion or problematic content should be deleted immediately. 'The participants should be cautious before mouthing venturous remarks and should not insult or offend the others'. It also banned 'morally provocative hosts and hostesses'. The shows are now forbidden to 'hype up marginal issues, show the ugly side of things, or overly depressing, dark or decadent topics'. SARFT made it clear that the show should display the optimistic attitude and correct values of the participants and maintain core socialist values.

⁹⁵ Yang Xiyun. (2010) 'China's Censors Rein in 'Vulgar' Reality TV Show'. *The New York Times* [online] 18 July. available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/19/world/asia/19chinatv.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3>[18 July 2010]

person. ...All valuable, meaningful, insightful, sharp remarks were cut off...' (Ifeng 2010).⁹⁶ It explains why the ratings have slumped since the changes. Most importantly, a new marriage law was introduced in August 2011, which deepens the disadvantaged position of women. According to China's highest court, 'from now on, when one party purchases a house, especially where his/her parents stand as the payer, he/she will have the ownership of this property after a divorce.' On 21st August 2011, *Telegraph* (UK) reported that the new marriage law is trying to reduce the expectation of Chinese women and the pressure on Chinese young men, attempting to control this potentially highly materialistic society.⁹⁷ By announcing the new marriage law, the central government actually responds to an unintended consequence of the one-child policy by using another policy. As women are now denied any advantage in the divorce, it invisibly requires women to depend more on herself. It therefore moulds the female to be a neoliberal subject who is self-reliant and self-responsible. The excessive, materialistic, 'immoral' discourse, I argue, epitomises a crisis of social security. However, the so-called 'gold digger' girl is identified as a 'social problem' and becomes a handy figure for being used to deflect attention from the true social crisis. It exemplifies the ideological function as displacement. As O'Shaughnessy states, it represents the means by which 'social contradictions are hidden or diverted to other areas' (1990:97). In the name of values about love, it covers up the insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety pervasive in daily life caused by the polarized disparity between rich and poor. Meanwhile, Dovey suggests that RTV might be 'releasing everyday voices into the public sphere and challenging established paternalisms' (2000:83). However, in the dating shows, the 'everyday voices' are repressed due to the regulation.

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Picture 20 Huang Han joins *IYAO* as the second guest host.

Picture 21 The vertical subtitle, 'Ma Nuo apologises to the national audience'.

Cynicism and Urbanisation

Finally, what are imposed in *IYAO* are traditional moral standards and values about love and marriage which appear to overlap with socialist values. The dating shows try to fill themselves with 'proper' values, and insist on that 'money can't buy you happiness'. The emphasis on socialist values actually targets at the neoliberal doctrine which causes 'improper' values. The gradual recovery of ratings seems to prove that the 'proper' values

⁹⁶ Ifeng (2010) *If You are the One will Record New Episode in June*. [online] available from <http://ent.ifeng.com/tv/news/mainland/detail_2010_06/19/1641820_0.shtml> [19 June 2010]

⁹⁷ MSN (2011) *The Chinese Government Tries to Stop Women Marry Money*. [online] available from <<http://money.msn.com.cn/internal/20110824/08491287701.shtml>> [24 August 2011]

are seen to be consented to. However, the neoliberal values nowadays are not anymore ideology in-itself, or ideology for-itself. It is 'the 'spontaneous' ideology at work at the heart of social 'reality' itself' (Zizek 1994a:8) by means of the market and exchange. Therefore, socialist morality is not going to be an efficient weapon to deal with the social crisis or regulate the market which is an ideology in-and-for itself. Perversely, the end result is most likely to be cynicism---as long as we believe (in our hearts) that money cannot buy you happiness, we are free to continue to worship money and maintain the materialistic impulses. As Fisher states,

Capitalism in general relies on this structure of disavowal. We believe that money is only a meaningless token of no intrinsic worth, yet we act as if it has a holy value. Moreover, this behavior precisely depends upon the prior disavowal--we are able to fetishise money in our actions only because we have already taken an ironic distance towards money in our heads. (2009:13)

This ironic, cynical distance, as Zizek argues, 'is just one way to blind ourselves to the structural power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*' (ibid). It is reflected in these dating shows that the two contradictory ideologies, both dominant in China at present, are fighting for and within hegemony. Except that the socialist position mainly dominates the moral sphere, whilst the neoliberal one dominates every aspects of social life by means of the apparently non-ideological market. Regulatory acts, on the surface, advance socialist morality, but in itself, it might just fall into the trap of capitalist realism. As Fisher states,

This was ideology in the old Althusserian sense--we were required to use a certain language and engaged in certain ritualised behaviours, but none of this mattered because we didn't really 'believe' in any of it. But of course the very privileging of 'inner' subjective states over the public was itself an ideological move. (2013:91)

The next part of analysis of *TEP* (picture 22) is relevant here because, I argue, the negotiated consensus of urbanisation in the show contributes to the formation of cynicism and the acceptance of 'this is the way things are now'(ibid:90). Specifically, two reasons make *TEP* an interesting case to look at, as discussed in Chapter 1. Firstly, the timing of the launch of the show. The talent shows were regulated in the period of 2006 to 2007, and the dating shows produced the intervention of SARFT in October 2011. Because they produced *Super Girl* and *Let's Go on a Date*, Hunan TV was accused twice of overly focusing on ratings. The unusual fact about *TEP* is that it was launched twice in these two periods to highlight media responsibility. It was broadcast from season one in 2006 through season four in 2008, and received approval from the official institutions, such as Ministry of Public Security, the Publicity Department of the Central Committee, the Publicity Department of the Hunan Provincial Committee, Hunan Communist Youth League committee, and others (Chen 2008: 21-22). Then, after nearly three years interval, it restarted with season five in 2012 and has continued till now. The ratings of season five

have reached 1.2%, and occupied No.1 in its time segment nationwide. During an interview at Changsha city, February 2012, editors Ma Xiaohan and Cai Yao both confirmed that Hunan TV re-launched *TEP* due to new regulation of SARFT.⁹⁸

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Picture 22 *The Exchange Programme*

The single frame taken from the opening sequence of *TEP*, season Five. Ipad on the left represents the urban culture while the book on a wooden desk represents the rural backward education.

Secondly, as discussed above, the overvaluation of money is rooted in the accelerated market reform, which is driving Chinese urbanisation. Chinese urbanisation has been following the global-neoliberal direction since the central government decided to change the focus of China's reform from the rural to the urban areas in 1984. Following that, a series of urban biased policies aimed to speed up city development came into effect. In a sense, Chinese modernisation is actually the process of accelerated urbanisation. Urban development represents the achievement of Open Reform, however, it also results in the urban-rural divide, which is the backcloth of *TEP*. I argue, the so-called media responsibility is about *TEPs* shaping and reflecting the consensus of urbanisation. As Hall stated, 'conflicts between social settlements and the crafting of hegemonies are the product of contending social forces' (2013:12). The contending social forces in the Chinese context indicate the rich versus the poor, the urban class versus the rural class, the renewed capitalist in and out of the party versus the reconstituted working class.

⁹⁸ *Further Strengthening Management on Satellite Television Channels and its Programmes:*

- a) From 1st January 2012 onwards, each satellite TV shall broadcast news programmes no less than 2hours between 6:00 till 24:00 each day; must produce more than two news programmes between 18:00 to 23:30, with each programme no less than 30 minutes; must produce one moral standards education programme which advocates the Chinese traditional virtue and socialist core values.
- b) Limits the broadcast of dating show, talent show, life story show, game show, talk show, etc. From 19:30 till 22:00, only no more than nine of these programmes can be on air nationwide. Each satellite TV should not broadcast more than two of these programmes in a week. The length of broadcast these programmes, from 19:30 till 22:00, should not exceed 90 minutes.
- c) Shall not practice the ratings ranking, shall not eliminate a programme purely based on its ratings.

Further, consenting to urbanisation suggests the acceptance of the neoliberal market and its cruel consequence as 'this is the way things are now'(Fisher 2013:90). Therefore, it results in the downplaying of what is revealed in dating shows and deepens the cynicism.

City Life is Better?

Facing the increasing social unrest of the rural areas, the central government launched a strategy known as 'a coordinated effort for rural-urban socio-economic development' in 2004, aiming to help the 800 million peasants to bridge the economic gap. But how to achieve this ambitious goal? Urbanisation still stands as the inevitable and the only choice. As the 2010 Shanghai World Expo promotes, 'City Makes a Better Future'. Happening in post-Mao China in the present day is the ongoing expansion of cities in the form of rural urbanisation, which is constantly engulfing the land of the farmers. According to Gregory Guldin, 'the countryside is urbanised in situ, as well as generating epochal migrations: villages become more like market and *xiang* (乡) towns, and county towns and small cities become more like large cities' (2001:14-17).

However, as Mike Davis (2004) assesses, accompanying the scenes of urbanisation are the scenes of urban slums, which have been happening worldwide. Yet, as Lv argues, 'the situation of urban slums in Chinese cities at present is not as serious as in other countries, such as Mexico or South Africa, which is credited to the Collective Land Ownership System' (ZGXCFX 2010).⁹⁹ As a fruit of the planned economy era, this system means that the rural community collectively owns the land. The farmers rely on its agricultural products to support their basic subsistence living. Lv (ibid) states that this system is the heritage of socialism, which is an important reason for the rise of the Chinese economy. For farmers, working in cities is the second way to increase their income. During a period of financial crisis, a large number of migrant workers are made redundant. Therefore, they go back to their countryside and support themselves by working on the land. The land, with its agricultural products, offers them the basic social security. The agricultural economy actually prevents the formation of urban slums, and therefore, supports the general rise of the Chinese economy. However, the in situ urbanisation of the countryside acts like the 'enclosure movement' and constantly engulfs the land. Without the land as their basic social security, we see the slums start to appear at these newly urbanised parts of the countryside, i.e. the new urban-rural border areas. The phenomenon, known as 'ants group', refers to the groups of young people and college graduates, who cannot find a job after graduation or work in poorly paid jobs and inhabit the urban-rural borders. Most people in this group come from the rural families. It suggests that there is a 'lack of viable housing plans for those who cannot find a place in the new, chaotic economy' (Yomi Braester 2010:235). It implies the retreat of the state and warns us that the 'city makes life better' may just be a fantasy for rural people. But how is city represented in *TEP*?

⁹⁹ Lv Xinyu (2010) 'Discussion on *Planet of Slums*'. ZGXCFX [online] 21 May. available from <<http://www.zgxcfx.com/Article/18144.html>> [21 May 2010]

The Portrayal of the City

In *TEP*, almost all the urban youth participants were chosen from affluent urban families, in which one or both parents can be categorised into stratum 1 through 3 (see Chapter1), while all the rural youth participants came from poor rural families, in which one or both parents are either peasants or migrant peasant workers. For example, in the first episode of season one, *Internet Addiction*, the urban youth Wei Cheng's father (picture23) works for the Inland Revenue and loves outdoor sports such as camping and climbing, his mother (picture24) is running a printing factory. She drives a BMW (picture25), owns a fancy duplex house (picture26) in the most bustling area of Changsha city, Hunan province. In the third episode of season three, *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, Chen Junwei's father (picture27, picture28) is general manager of an insurance company in Beihai city, Guangxi province. In the first episode of season four, *Love in a Distant Mountain*, Gao Zeye's father is a bridge construction contractor. This family owns two big cranes worth 360,000 pounds (picture29) and several properties in Xian city, Shanxi province. In the second episode of season four, *Love Elsewhere*, Zhang Yuhan's mother (picture30) is Chief finance officer of a big company in Zhengzhou city, Henan province. Therefore, this family can afford a piano for their beloved son (picture31). For season five, in the first episode, *Youth don't be Sad*, Yi Huchen's father owns a small hardware instruments factory (picture32) in Shenzhen city, Guangdong province. In the second episode, *Beauty Arithmetic*, Li Naiyue's father (picture33) is a high rank manager of one big state-owned enterprise in Jingzhou city, Hubei province. In the third episode, *Warm Pain*, Gong Weihua's parents own and run three big restaurants (picture34) in Guangzhou city, Guangdong province.

In the discussion of the Wuhu city focus group A(Y)¹⁰⁰, member ay5 states, 'I hate Hunan TV. Is the life of urban people all about airplanes, BMWs and MacDonald's? Why don't you put rural youth into an ordinary urban family, which is where the biggest proportion of urban families lie? Why don't you put him in an unemployed, laid-off worker's family?' (25th December 2010). *TEP* particularly chooses the affluent urban families to represent the city and its material achievement. On the other hand, all of the rural families picked by the show are extremely poor. In *TEP*, this particular version of the urban and the rural is represented as epitomising the totality of the rich and poor.

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Picture 23 Wei's father getting in his car.

Picture 24 Wei's mother runs a printing factory.

¹⁰⁰ A(Y), the focus group of Wuhu city, 20-35 year old. See Appendix 1.

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Picture 25 Wei's mother drives a BMW.
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Picture 26 Wei's parents own a fancy duplex house.
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Picture 27

Chen Junwei's father chairing a meeting as general manager, 'he has a very successful career'(subtitle).
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Picture 28

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Picture 29 Gao's family owns two big cranes.
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Picture 30 Zhang's mother is CFO of a big company.
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Picture 31 Zhang Yuhan playing the piano.

Picture 32 Yi Huchen's father owns a small factory.

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Picture 33

The subtitle says, 'Li Naiyue's father (the standing man) is a high ranking manager of a big SOE.

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Picture 34 Gong Weihua's parents own and run this big sea food restaurant.

Psychological Turmoil and Transformation

The first episode of *TEP, Internet Addiction*¹⁰¹, was on air on 4th September 2006. In this episode, a rural youth, Gao Zhanxi (picture 35) was brought to an urban family in Changsha city, from a remote rural village in Qinghai province. It was arranged for him to travel by airplane, experience a BMW, receive a make-over, enjoy a sumptuous meal and go shopping, etc. Facing the giant economic gap, Gao's emotional reaction, such as fear, helplessness, loneliness, happiness, anxiety, crying and bewilderment, was recorded and directly displayed on the screen for the nationwide audience. Editor Liu Xuebo, who was responsible for shooting Gao while he was staying in Changsha city, puts in his diary, 'Gao's tearfulness in the BMW (picture 36) reflects vividly this rural youth's fear, loneliness, helplessness and loss. It is much better than any plan the directors racked their brains to design.'¹⁰² This editor's diary also reveals that Gao's itinerary in Changsha is deliberately planned in advance. By doing so, the show consciously stimulates and records the raw emotion of Gao, representing it as the 'authentic moment' (Hill 2005). The urban mother

¹⁰¹ Parenting has been problem for many urban one-child families. *TEP* especially draws attention of these families. Besides, the rural child from migrant peasant workers' families, who are left behind in the rural areas, has been one of the social issues of public concern. With the urban-rural divide as its backdrop, the show has a fairly high social sensitivity. The public concern delivers good ratings.

¹⁰² HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2006) 'Editor's Diary----Liu Xuebo'. [online] available from
<http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd1010006j6.html> [11 October 2006]

even handed Gao a mobile phone, asked him to make a phone call to his family to notify his parents that he landed safely. In fact, the production team was aware that Gao's family didn't have either a landline or any mobile phones. Holding the mobile phone in his hand, which 'he had never seen before'(voiceover), Gao cried again. After broadcasting, the show immediately caused a controversy about Gao's psychological turmoil induced by experiencing city life.

As an internet user *nycyh* writes on the official Blog, 'this program is very cruel, especially for the rural youth...he didn't know the wonderful outside world before...now he might hate the unfair fate...he maybe strives for a good life...or gives it up...maybe becomes a criminal.'¹⁰³ This apparently sympathetic comment still works within a very backward and stereotypical representation of the rural poor. In a personal Blog titled, *The Poor Gao Zhanxi, the Odious Hunan TV, bingtanghulu* condemns Hunan TV for losing the base line of morality by 'arbitrarily bullying the poor for their own commercial benefit'.¹⁰⁴ In order to avoid psychological turmoil, he insists that *TEP* should not bring any rural youth to experience city life using the misleading promise of 'it is good for rural youth'. Some audiences post their similar comments on the follow up blog, for instance:

Luguo: I cry for Gao, for the dream that the media have deliberately constructed for him, in here (city), what is he? Who is he? We shouldn't be such a cruel audience.

Patengdeyao: I cry... I feel so upset to see Gao waiting in at the airport. How could a rural youth, who has never seen an airport before, know how to walk out of the airport and find the people who come over to pick him up but who he has never met before?

Wuming: This show is pleasing the rich by mocking the disadvantaged group.....Hunan TV has lost its moral base line and dignity; it has become a villain bullying the kids on street to please their master.

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Picture 35 Gao took pictures on airplane.

Picture 36 Gao cried in BMW.

¹⁰³ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2008) 'Love Elsewhere Starts'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008q54.html#comment2> [21 March 2008]

¹⁰⁴ *Bingtanghulu* Blog (2006) 'The Poor Gao Zhanxi, the Odious Hunan TV'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_55c8d83b010005xg.html>[23 September 2006]. See partial translation in Appendix 2.

However, whether experiencing city life or not, rural residents are already clearly aware of the enormous urban-rural disparity, which means that the psychological turmoil is already there. In the episode *Love in a Remote Mountain* in season four, the aunt of the rural youth Luo Xianwang mentions her concern in front of the camera,

I worry that he (the urban youth) might look down on this poor family; he might not get used to our lifestyle. We don't have pocket money for him to spend. We don't have meat for him to eat. We only have vegetables. I am worried that he might not adapt to these.

Lu Xianwang was also explicit about his concern, 'urban kids are all arrogant. As long as they don't scold my school, my village people, that is fine, no matter how harsh they snap at me.'¹⁰⁵

So, what makes it so important for rural youth to experience city life? As discussed above, the arrangements for rural youth to experience city life amount to the process of enjoying the prosperity of modern life and accepting the transformations of consumer culture. It is the concrete manifestation of the common-sense assertion of 'city makes life better'. In order to make rural youth to willingly accept the doctrine of market-driven urbanisation, he is seen as needing to 'broaden his horizon'. Firstly, let him enjoy the material prosperity, and then promise him the dream of a fantastic future. By doing so, *TEP* interpellates rural youth into the position of accepting the goal and rationality of urbanisation, and eventually, legitimises the imperfect situation and the discipline of this regime imposed on rural youth in general. It explains the different comments on the follow up blog:

Meizi: I think *TEP* is very novel, there is nothing bad. Gao broadens his horizons and realises that he could have this good life as long as he works hard in school...with the help of more kindhearted people, I think he will get the future he wants.

Tantao: If I was Gao, I would be glad to get to know the world outside the mountains...If I was Gao, I would like to understand the world earlier.

Huhuran: So the blogger wants to keep Gao in his ignorance and remain uncivilised? It is obviously better to let him see the world. Without ambition how could one fight and work hard?...Think of the 1980s, when we heard from old classmates who came back from overseas with news that every foreign family has AC, a telephone, etc, how envious we were! That gave us a goal. Now, our country has become the biggest market by volume of sales in the world for telephones and AC! You only progress when you have a goal.

¹⁰⁵ In my in-depth interview with C2, a principal of one middle school for the children of migrant peasant workers, he also talks about the situation of his students who have been living at the urban-rural borders or urban slum areas, 'even living in the cities, wearing the similar clothes, playing the same video games, these migrant rural youth still have no sense of belonging to the city, have no security.' The psychological turmoil is always there.

This opinion resonates with the members of the Hangzhou city focus group B(Y)¹⁰⁶, as member by2 says, 'turmoil, yes, a bit, but it is good to see the city, it gives him a drive, in order to have this urban life, he will work hard in school.'

In *TEP*, the city appears as D.H. Lawrence once described it. It has the 'beauty, dignity and a certain splendor' (quoted in Williams 1973:266). The complacent urban media demonstrates their superiority with a proud tone, 'knowing that he is going to a city, tremendous happiness is spreading through the whole village. Gao is like a glorious representative of the village. Even the head of the village comes over to see him off' (voiceover). Obviously, it is not the same stance as the ancient western literati's, who, in their country-house poems such as *Benshurst* (Ben Jonson) and *To Saxham* (Thomas Carew), 'cherishes the declined feudal aristocratic life on the country house and disdain the burgeoning capitalistic life in the city' (Williams 1973:26). Neither is it the same stance as the Chinese ancient literati's, who quit the dark, greedy court of the city in the hope of proving his integrity.¹⁰⁷ The Chinese rural people are told that they need to look forward, not back, to accept the capitalistic life, even it is full of exploitation and competition.

Rural people's longing for the city is palpable, which was manifested in the rural youths' description, 'the city is full of skyscrapers, very tall, the top is out of sight. I always dream about going there, just have no chance', 'they maybe take buses to go to school, unlike us, we have to walk a long way. We wear clothes with patches, they don't. The ordinary foods they eat daily are delicious for us', 'they have many electric appliances.' It suggests that modernisation is cheered as victorious and glamorous, and becomes the universal value, common dream and consensus in post-Mao China due to the suffering of the materially-poor past. It is not only city's practice, but also the desire of rural community. Entering a city, becoming an urban dweller is suggestive of being a modern person. The entire 'Chinese nation' is admiring the western-style modernisation. Therefore, adapting to modern life is inevitable.

City and country are used as the label of identity, suggesting the distinction between the new and the old, the modern and the traditional, the strong and the weak, the neoliberal market and the socialist regime. Finally, in order to realise modernisation, subjects have to accept the doctrine of market order, competitive individualism, and consumer culture. Thus, Gao was asked to experience selling newspapers in the early morning. It reflects the ideas of the **Freiburg School** (Chapter 2), which advocates that individuals should be

¹⁰⁶ B(Y), the focus group of Hangzhou city, 20-35 year old. See Appendix 1.

¹⁰⁷ In long history of feudalism, many Chinese ancient literati, such as Tao Yuanming (365-427), Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), hate the greed, the calculation and the plotting of court at that time. These literati uphold integrity and have the passion for the life of nature. Hence, resigning and returning to the rural area is always their choice. Like Williams said, 'all traditions are selective: the pastoral tradition quite as much as any other' (1973:18). Living an impoverished life in the country, these literati write pastoral poems depicting the simple of the country and its innocent, honesty people, expressing their loathing of feudalist court and their continued integrity. These literati are marked as the noble country gentlemen who insist good virtue, rather than compromise with the rule of 'game of throne'.

entrepreneurs. After seeing many tramps sleeping under the bridge, Gao said, 'it is difficult to live in a city. Money is very important, you can't buy anything without money.' It is the city life: enjoy it if you are rich, suffer if you are poor (picture 37). The city is materialistic by its nature.

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Picture 37

Chinese characters on the screen says *City Makes Life Better*, while four exhausted workers sleep on their luggage under this slogan. It is such an ironic juxtaposition.

To be a 'Do-Good' Programme

Facing criticism, the producer Liu Qian insists that experiencing city life and knowing the outside world could nudge rural youth's fighting will to work hard at school in order to get a life changing opportunity (Hunan *TEP* Blog 2008).¹⁰⁸ Soon after, Zhang Yiyun (picture 38), a psychologist, is invited to be a guest host. As the production team states, 'we do this for two reasons. Firstly, to offer psychological treatment to the youth participants, to avoid the potential psychological turmoil caused by the changing environment. Secondly, to analyse the psychological changes of the youth in the period of social transition, and to enlighten the youth's family education' (Hunan *TEP* Blog 2007).¹⁰⁹ Again, the show reduces the social problem to an individual problem. During the interview with focus group A(Y), member a4 says¹¹⁰, 'I think that the psychological turmoil, which we have talked about earlier, is inevitable. You have to deal with it, but it is a personal issue. If you had trouble, that means you didn't manage it well.' This comment reveals an attitude towards a pragmatic adjustment----'this is the way things are now' (Fisher 2013:90). It is the sense of resignation, of fatalism, which is crucial to capitalist realism and it implies that the young rural generation has to accept the neoliberal urbanisation and its idea of self-responsibility. As Fisher comments, 'capitalist realism isn't the direct endorsement of neoliberal doctrine;

¹⁰⁸ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2008) 'Interview with Liu Qian'. [online] available from
<http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008uou.html> [2 April 2008]

¹⁰⁹ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2007) '*TEP* season Two Starts on 5 March'. [online] available from
<http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008go.html> [5 March 2007]

¹¹⁰ Male, 27year old, assistant engineer, university degree. See Appendix 1.

it's the idea that, whether we like it or not, the world is governed by neoliberal ideas, and that won't change. There's no point fighting the inevitable' (ibid). Additionally, the show cooperated with *China Youth Development Foundation* to establish the *Hope Project*---Hunan Satellite TV 'Happy Growth Foundation' in June 2007 (Hunan TEP Blog 2007)¹¹¹. The rural participants of the show and other rural youth will get financial support for their school education (picture 39).¹¹² TEP is functioning as a 'do-good' (Ouellette, 2010) programme, a philanthropic programme, to encourage urban people reaching out and helping rural people, as a civic service. No wonder it receives praise from the government. An intellectual, Deng Yuwen, fantasises about a television market 'brimming with elegant, highbrow programmes which comply with the government's requirement, but still managing to attract a large audience' (QQ News 2011).¹¹³ It seems that TEP perfectly fits his description of a 'good' programme.

TEP insists on the necessity of rural youth accepting the doctrine of the market and believing that the 'city makes life better'. Urbanisation and changes become inevitable and for the better, 'which gives high priority to the improvement of material prosperity and which is, finally, capitalist and competitive' (Fiske 1990:170). TEP functions as a platform to shape and reflect the consensus and reaffirm the inevitability of urbanisation. By doing so, the show legitimises the aggressive themes of neoliberalism---market order, competitive individualism, and individual responsibility.

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Picture 38 Zhang Yiyun, a psychologist joins TEP as its guest host.

Picture 39 Rural youth receive stationery, satchels, and other gifts.

¹¹¹ HunanTV TEP Blog (2007) 'TEP and China Youth Development Foundation establishing Happy Growth Foundation'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd1010009rq.html> [22 May 2007]. In 2012 with the return of season Five, the foundation was renamed as *Mango Foundation* after Hunan TV's online Mango TV.

¹¹² However, the charities only 'adopt and propagate the practice of begging favours on sympathetic and humanitarian grounds rather than making the oppressed conscious of their rights' (P.K.Das 1987:179-80). Sympathy is precisely what rural youth don't want. As the rural girl Qin Gan says in episode *How Far is Spring*, 'I don't want to live under social sympathy, I don't want to act like a poor, pathetic girl just to get a little economic support.' Inviting the psychologist and establishing the foundation are strategies to win the public approval and contribute to the construction of hegemony.

¹¹³ Deng Yuwen (2011) 'SARFT's Regulation on Entertainment Television puts the Cart before the Horse'. QQ News [online] 4 November. available from <<http://view.news.qq.com/a/20111104/000028.htm>> [4 November 2011]

Conclusion

The anxiety and trauma revealed in the dating shows can be seen as the continuation and exacerbation of personal turmoil reflected in *TEP*, and both of them are induced and sanctioned by the neoliberal market. However, as exposed by the online contributor's comments on *TEP*, the history of being poor and backward is a collective trauma for the entire 'Chinese nation'. Though the materialistic discourse suggests anxiety and anger, it also implies the fear of being left behind. This fear has been appropriated and turned into the drive for pursuing the western or capitalist style modernisation. The discourse of the inevitability of urbanisation finally wins the consensus. Besides, we see two common-sense assertions: 'money can't buy you happiness' and 'city makes life better', the former indicates socialist morality, whilst the later implies the capitalist market practice. Socialist morality is imposed in the dating shows with the intention of offsetting the negative impact of the market. However, the end result is most likely a cynical attitude towards money and the market, 'so long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange' (Fisher 2009:13). Employing socialist morality at the level of discourse to fight against the market practice as an extra-ideological coercion is doomed to failure.

CRTV is paradoxical, as it reveals social trauma, but also represses or downplays it and contributes to the formation of cynicism and accommodation. It is the media believing socialist morality on behalf of people, and yet also letting the people continually pursue money. It suggests that, facing the market as an ideology in-and-for itself, socialist morality is not an efficient weapon, as Marx said, 'the weapon of criticism cannot replace criticism by weapons' (Marxists Internet Archive 1844).¹¹⁴ The force of the market can only be offset by force at the same level. So, is the socialist morality the only socialist legacy? Does socialist ideology include an unconscious overlooked illusion as well, just like the capitalist market system is supported by a fetishistic illusion? These questions will be discussed in the next chapter, in which I examine more of *TEP*, especially in regard to its sending the 'bratty' urban youth to the countryside.

¹¹⁴ Marxists Internet Archive (n.d.) 'Abstract from the Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'. [online] available from
<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/df-jahrbucher/law-abs.htm>>

Chapter Five

Idealised Urban Youth and Original Culture

----Ideological Fantasy and Socialist Legacy

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the dating shows were asked to impose the 'proper' socialist values and insist on that money cannot buy you happiness. It targets at not only the materialistic discourses, but also the neoliberal market which causes this materialistic attitude. However, socialist morality is not an efficient weapon to regulate the market, it is rather more likely to deepen cynicism and downplay social trauma. The question is, does the socialist legacy only exist in the form of socialist morality? Analysing *TEP*, a different answer is offered.

The originality of *TEP* is, by means of sending a 'bratty' urban youth (internet addiction, school dropout, rebelliousness) to the countryside, it shows an urban youth transformed into a 'perfect' one. *TEP* firstly represents a 'bratty' urban youth as a civilised youth who is essentially kind and good, and then, his experience in the countryside, with the rediscovered rural poverty and the heart-rending pathos, are used as a warning that triggers his transformation. In this way, *TEP* endeavors to persuade the 'bratty' urban youth to get back to urban school in order to receive the necessary cultural capital and be part of modernisation. Meanwhile, the opening sequence can be read as indicating a connection between the damaged urban youth and the damaged city. When the city is sutured by neoliberalism due to its increasing engagement with the market, the countryside sutured by another master signifier, socialism, and is represented in *TEP* as the birth place of the nation's socialist culture. So *TEP* can be held as revealing the changing 'hybridity' (Bhabha 1994) of the city in the Chinese context, with the latter becoming a battle field, a 'third space'(ibid) of culture and discourse, in which the countryside acts as the nation's 'original culture'(ibid). For the Chinese government, the city is expected to be economically successful, spiritually modern and morally sound, the city is expected to be like a 'perfect' urban youth, who inherits socialist values, behaves in a civilised way and also possesses material prosperity.

So, returning to the countryside not only acts as a wake up call for the 'bratty' urban youth, it also implies an attempt to ideologically solve the contradiction between the neoliberal market and socialism. Most importantly, it is not any more socialist morality (ideology in-itself) fighting the neoliberal market (ideology in-and-for itself). It now includes a piece of practical action----returning to the countryside, which suggests an already existing, concrete, materialised belief. I argue, this belief supports an overlooked, unconscious illusion of the countryside, i.e. an 'ideological fantasy' (Zizek 1989:30), in the Chinese context. It suggests that fighting the market is not going to be a vain attempt, because, socialist ideology can also be an ideology in-and-for itself, 'the 'spontaneous' ideology at work at the heart of social 'reality' itself' (Zizek 1994a:8). The meaning of its struggle in the

city, in a 'third space', is not going to be limited at the level of culture and discourse, its resisting, regulating, hybridising the cruelty and immorality of the neoliberal market is supported by a series of practices that are part of the materialised belief. Further, the nature of the countryside is not just a result of a structural misrecognition or substitution. I argue, the countryside fantasy, the 'pre-comprehension' (Zizek 1989) of the countryside, also suggests the persistent existence of the socialist legacy, which continues the struggle between socialism and neoliberalism at the level of the unconscious.

Affluence and Modern Knowledge

As discussed in the previous chapter, *TEP* picks only affluent families to represent the modern city and its material achievement. All of the 'bratty' urban youth participants come from rich families. Additionally, the material achievement is credited to what is seen as advanced modern knowledge. In the opening sequence of *Internet Addiction (IA)*, urban youth Wei Cheng (picture 40) is introduced by a voiceover, 'he, urban youth, does not value the affluent life, loses interest in studying, stays out at night in internet bars.' The visual shot, used to illustrate the idea that '[he] does not value the affluent life', is of a bookcase full of different hardcover or softcover books in his family's reading room (picture 41). From the outset, the urban affluent life exists, in the first place, as signified by the presence of books representing knowledge and culture. Therefore, urban youth participants are always asked to teach rural classmates computer applications and/or English, which wins them respect. For instance, Wei Cheng was asked to teach his rural classmates computer applications, such as how to use Microsoft Word. His knowledge of computer skills won him respect as an urban student educated by urban civilisation. The rural students praised Wei for his sincere attitude and efficient teaching. Similarly, in season five, the urban youth Yi Huchen and Li Naiyue (picture 42) were also asked to teach English lessons to a rural class. In China, where the market-driven economic reform is speeding up, English and the Internet are undoubtedly the symbols of modern civilisation and necessary communication with the world. Modern knowledge is seen to be adored by rural youth.

Besides, because of increased affluence and modern knowledge, the urban youth participant, as a representative of the city, becomes a noble figure and always receives an enthusiastic welcome. When Wei Cheng arrived in the village, the villagers came over to watch the bustling scene and applause that greets him (picture 43). Gao's father joined the crowd and wore a new suit. Gao's mother even borrowed money for making a relatively presentable dinner for him, as the voiceover said, 'fried eggs, fried vegetables. In this poor family, these dishes can only usually be seen annually during the Spring Festival.' In addition, the voiceover put it, 'Wei Cheng is, indeed, a well informed urban youth. He waves his hand the same as an official leader visiting a village filmed for television.' In other episodes, such as *Love in a Distant Mountain*, *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, *Love Elsewhere*, and *Beauty Arithmetic*, the traditional courtesies of ethnic groups greeting honoured guests, such as the greeting bonfire of the Yi group (picture 44), the three times face washing of the Buyi group, firing shots into the air of the Basha Miao group (picture 45), and the greeting song performance of the Miao group, were genuinely

performed, the head of the village also waited for the urban youth's arrival. As the show proclaimed, 'almost the whole village comes out to welcome the urban youth as their honoured guest.' The way that the countryside treats the urban youth reinforces the perception of the complacency of the city.

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Picture 40

The rural mother welcomes Wei arriving her village.

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Picture 41 The bookcase with the subtitle, '(he) doesn't value the affluent life.'

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Picture 42 Li Naiyue teaching an English lesson.

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Picture 43 All villagers came out to welcome Wei.

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Picture 44 The subtitle, 'the village has never had such a big greeting bonfire before.'

Picture 45 Four men of the Basha Miao group firing shots into the air to welcome Chen.

Good Nature and Behaviour Modification

It needs to be noted that all the urban youth participants picked by *TEP* are rebellious in one way or another, sharing some common characters such as, internet addiction, apathy, being school dropouts or playing truant. However, the show always tries to convey the image that the natures of these participants are good by demonstrating their previous school achievements, certificates and praising their behaviour while staying in the rural area. The importance of analysing the first episode *1A* of season one is that it sets up the

tone and some of the basic strategies for the show's narration, such as emphasising urban affluence and modern knowledge, using school grades to prove the good nature.

At the beginning of *IA*, there is a title sequence that shows a still image promoting Wei Cheng as a previous junior student of one of the outstanding middle schools in Changsha city (picture 46). The shot gives a close-up of the certificates of merit, grade, etc. to introduce Wei's outstanding school achievement while he was attending that middle school (picture 47). It seems to be taken for granted that the nature of a student can always be proved by his/her school achievement. Wei was identified as a 'bratty' boy, who nevertheless is essentially kind and good. Then, the voiceover says that there was a secret kept by Wei which caused him to unexpectedly drop out of school.¹¹⁵ It implies, once we find out and sort out the problem that the 'bratty' boy would revert to a sensible one again due to his good nature. It is the programme's assumption that Wei only needs a bit of behaviour modification. This narrative strategy is repeatedly applied to other episodes. In the episode called *The Grid* (5th season), the show demonstrates two citations which were awarded to the urban boy Zhou Yunfeng and raises a question, which rationalises the following process of gradually revealing the secret, 'why does this ever glamorous excellent student turn into a rebellious, aggressive one who is tired of school?' In the episode called *Beauty Arithmetic* (5th season), the urban girl Li Naiyue (picture 48) is labelled as 'playing truant, giving emotional abuse and being mischievous'. She has a strong rejection of school and teachers, because she used to be punished by kneeling at the office for a whole morning. As the voiceover says, 'this extreme punishment deeply hurts her.' The show wants the audiences to keep such information in their mind and understand that they all used to be well-behaved urban youths, the reason for their rebelliousness will be found in the end, and the problem will be solved.

TEP also identifies the good nature of urban youth by observing their behaviour in the countryside. On day four, the almost-blind rural father took out 20RMB [£2], which he had saved for a long time, in order to fulfill Wei's wish to go to the Yellow River (picture 49). Wei said, 'this family treats me very well. I am truly touched.' He wrote in his dairy (picture 50), 'I had tears in my eyes, but I held back and did not cry. Holding that 20RMB in my hands, my heart feels like it's bleeding. They have such a difficult, poor life, but still gave me 20RMB. I feel the great love of the father.' The presenter said emotionally to the camera, 'it is the purity in him woken up by the selflessness and kindness.'¹¹⁶ Then, on day five, it was arranged for Wei to work on a construction site for a day to earn money and pay back that 20RMB to Gao's father (picture 51). The voiceover put this over with a happy tone, 'Wei has decided not to owe money to this family...Compared with his slack

¹¹⁵ After initially raising that there is and then using a process of gradually revealing the secret is one typical of documentary production. However, this secret, as knowledge, revealed by the show is individual, rather than social.

¹¹⁶ It needs to be noted that the rural father here was surprisingly depicted as selfless and kind. This discourse contradicts the stock one, which depicts the migrant peasant worker as ignorant, uncivilised and a potential criminal (Li and Qiao 2005). It seems that the farmers could be the 'nice' other only if they stay in the remote rural area, live their impoverished life and accept their preordained 'fate'.

performance of reaping wheat, Wei seems to have changed into a different person today and works very hard.' By the end of the day, Wei cried in front of the camera and apologised to his parents (picture 52), 'I'm sorry, dad and mum. I should behave. I know that you care about me. I should have talked to you more often.' Wei's performance won the audience's tears and support. Many of the audience commented on the official Blog, expressing their feelings and praising Wei's good nature. In my in-depth interview with C3¹¹⁷, she says, 'I really like Wei Cheng. In fact, he is essentially pure and innocent. There was a reason why he became apathetic and 'decadent'. Watching him gradually showing his kind heart and gratitude in the show, I feel very happy for him.'

Revelation of the secret, hence, is pertinent for supporting the idea that he is essentially good. Day six, on his way back from visiting the Yellow River, Wei got crushed emotionally and cried again. He himself revealed the secret of his dropping out of school. It was on a picnic with a class from another high school. He brought some beer. His PE teacher thought that he should not drink alcohol as a middle school student. When Wei argued back, the teacher felt disrespected in front of the students from the other school, and slapped his face. This is why he suddenly does not want to go to school again. The voiceover then marveled, 'on the surface, Wei looks like a 'bratty' gloomy boy, but he has actually suffered from pain and frustration.' Likewise, in each episode, a secret is revealed to explain the urban youth participants' 'bratty' behaviour. For example, for Gao Zeye (*Love in a Distant Mountain*), the reason is that he has to face the issue of parental discord. For Li Naiyue (*Beauty Arithmetic*), the reason is that she was very hurt to find that she was an adopted baby who was abandoned by her biological parents three days after birth. For Gong Weihua (*Warm Pain*), he gets hurt and jealous because he thinks his younger brother gets more attention from their parents. After the reason is revealed, the urban youth is released from his/her burden and becomes simply a child who gets hurt and has a good nature, a good heart.

Psychologist Zhang Yiyun, as a guest host, also provides her professional knowledge about the rebelliousness of urban youth through the analysis of three factors which were given as reasons: a). inefficient communication between parents and their children; b). the Internet and the sense of personal accomplishment gained by winning video games which seduces them into escaping from responsibility; c). the typical characteristics of youth such as being sensitive and demanding respect during puberty.¹¹⁸ This kind of analysis releases the urban youth from condemnation being targeted at their rebelliousness. In fact, the discourse about urban youth's nature is in accordance with two traditional Chinese proverbs, which function as common-sense assertions, 'Man's nature at birth is good' and 'Material pleasure makes people corrupt, easy life makes people slack off'. As one audience member comments on the official Blog, 'the nature of every child is good...urban youths don't show their goodness just because they have been living an easy life in

¹¹⁷ Female, 27 year-old, media company, master degree. See Appendix 1.

¹¹⁸ However, her explanation doesn't touch much on the social reasons, such as the impact of the damaged city, the family's new-earned money, too busy parents, and hedonism, etc.

excellent conditions' (Hunan *TEP* Blog 2008).¹¹⁹

In summary, urban youth is beautified in the discourse. Labels such as well-informed, sophisticated and civilised, easy mannered and sincere construct urban youth as a modern youth with a good nature. The show highlights their cuteness and plays down their immoral behaviors or casually mention it without criticism. For example, once in an internet bar, Wei tried to extort money from another guest by pretending that his clothes were ruined by this guest and threatening to call 110. Wei's bad habits, such as smoking, were also not criticized. Similarly, in the episode, *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, the urban youth Chen Junwei swore several times, however, it was perceived as his being candid, which means he was not performing for the camera and was, therefore, genuine. On the contrary, it is common to see rural people slated by the media as uncivilised, uncouth for behaviours such as swearing, cheating, smoking and fighting. These double standards or what might be called 'a specific urban perspective' is admitted by editor Liu Ying during her interview, 'the editors have been living in cities for 20, 30 years. It would be a lie if we say that we don't see things with an urban perspective, it is natural, we cannot deny it' (Chen 2008:38). Applying the urban perspective, the editors identify with urban youth and describe them with empathy and urban-centric pride. A little internet knowledge, rudimentary English, graceful etiquette and a sophisticated urban look are enough to prove urban youth as a modern person from a modern world. Besides, in the eye of *TEP*, the 'bratty' urban youth only lacks a bit of self-control. For example, Wei once told his rural classmates, 'the online world is a bit fake. You enjoy a sense of success by playing video games. You also learn a lot, information, what is happening in the other countries, etc. But it is hard to restrain yourself from playing too many games, it is not good for your eyes.' The voiceover comment, 'it looks like Wei just lacks a bit of self-control...The classmates know nothing about his inner struggle, but only feel his kindness and sincerity.' Therefore, what is needed is a transformation at the level of behaviour. Country life, as the site of rediscovered poverty and hardship, is then taken as a source of fortitude, heart-rending pathos and a warning to touch the 'bratty' urban youth and trigger transformations.

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Picture 46

The still image of Wei with titles to introduce him.

Picture 47

One of the certificates to praise Wei's school score.

¹¹⁹ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2008) 'Zhang Yuhan's thought after the show'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008uby.html#comment3> [1 April 2008]

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Picture 48 The urban girl Li Naiyue is on her way to the village.

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Picture 49 The rural blind father taking out
money, which he has been saving for a long time.

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Picture 50 Wei Cheng's diary

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Picture 51 Wei working hard on a construction site. Picture 52 Wei cries and apologises to his parents.

Country Life as Pathos and Warning

The voiceover makes comments as follows, 'how would we miss the misery? but suffering can really help us' (in *Warm Pain*), 'suffering always plays the best teacher' (in *The Grid*).¹²⁰ Thus, the strenuous farm labour, the miserable living conditions and the hard-won opportunity of going to school, are shown as embodying misery and suffering, and used as a form of warning. As Gao Zeyi (*Love in a Distant Mountain*) says, '7 days living in the countryside...I've prepared for the worst, I am preparing to die.'

¹²⁰ Psychologist Zhang Yiyun (5th March 2007) also confirmed and rationalised it in her prologue of season Two, 'in a sense, the opportunity of experiencing the different life, offered by this programme, is more profound, in regard to touch the youth emotionally and trigger the change.'

It is not strictly demanded for the urban youth to participate in strenuous farm labour, *TEP* places more focus on unfolding the hardship of rural life and rendering its pathos. In *Love in a Distant Mountain*, Gao Zeyi (picture 53) was determined to throw away a piece of an expired snack brought with him from the city. Siyin (picture 54), a five-year-old girl, burst into tears due to not having it. The voiceover says, 'seeing Siyin crying, our heart gets more grief. Gao threw away the desert that the rural girl can only dream about...at this very moment, Gao, a boy spoiled by the prosperous urban life, seems to start to understand the hardship of life.' Siyin, only five years old, has already gone to cut firewood on the mountain. The voiceover states, 'from the day they were born, rural children have to learn to bear the weight of life with their tender shoulders ... when urban children are nestled in their mothers arms, this little rural girl has already started to fight the suffering life with her limited strength.' Gao writes in his diary, 'I surf on the internet every day, Siyin goes to mountain every day, such a little girl has to bear such a hardship. Compared with her, I feel ashamed.' After visiting the rural school, Gao says to the camera, 'it is totally different to my school, my school is like heaven, this is like a hell. It is so difficult for them to have what I have in the city, my parents work hard to give me the good life.'

In *The Grid*, Chen Yulin (picture 55), a 13 years old Guizhou rural boy, decides to sacrifice his own university dream, bear farm labour and chores, and look after his brothers, just for letting his older brother, who has excellent school grades, to focus on progressing to high school, and further achieve this family's university dream. As the voiceover says, 'for this dream, the parents have to migrate and work in a city far away. To save the travel fare, they haven't returned to the family for two years. To earn more money, they work as collectors of paint barrels, which is a job implicated in exposure to heavy pollution.' The older brother Changgui, therefore, does not want to continue his schooling, he says, 'I have two brothers, this family can't afford it if I go to university, I want to quit my school, help my family, so that my brother can go to school.' The cruel and yet warm story makes Zhou Yunfeng (picture 56), a 14 years old urban 'bratty' youth feel 'ashamed, touched, remorseful, and full of self-reproach'. He is shocked by knowing that, 'in order to go to university, everyone in this warm family is making a sacrifice' (voiceover). Therefore, Zhou decides to try his best to help this family by going to carry briquettes. Visiting the briquette site, he meets another two poor brothers who do the same job. These two brothers cannot even afford to eat meat once a year and their parents are working a long way away all year long. Zhou says, 'comparing their life with mine, it seems that there is nothing difficult that I can't handle.' By the end of the show, Zhou, who hates school so much, tries to persuade the older brother not to quit school, the show praises him, 'we hear the melting of the ice in his heart, as well as the power of his kindness.'

In *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, Chen Junwei (picture 57), as the voiceover states, is 'a dissipated urban youth, treats home like a hotel, treats his parents as strangers, and rejects school as a prison, paying no attention to life goals.' During his stay in the village, he saw Jingxiang (picture 58), a five years old boy, working in the field with a special hoe made for him. As the voiceover puts it, 'Basha children must learn to earn their living with their hands, overcome suffering with their own strength, from the day they know how to

walk.’ Chen also saw Wushuai (picture 59), a teenage girl, being asked by her father to quit school. Chen realises that she might just repeat her mother’s fate and stay in this remote mountain forever. He argues aggressively with the father to resume her education, ‘you are ruining her life! She would end up as a poor farmer like you if she didn’t go to school!’ However, the father hits the nail on the head, ‘you can go to school without worrying about living, but we can only survive by working on the land.’ When Chen found out that the father’s brother was ill, he took him to town to see a doctor in hospital. They were asked for 2000RMB [£200] for the hospital fee for treatment and accomodation, however, the father fell apart and ran away because he could not afford it. By the end, the voiceover concludes¹²¹,

Chen finds his self-worth by helping the little sister to get back to school. He now can distinguish between wrong and right, knows that he must take on his role and duty...after witnessing the family’s helplessness in the hospital. He finally reflects on his own rebellious past, it is a successful journey of mind purification. The apathy, feeling lost and rebellious, have gone, instead, there is a restored love, and feelings of care and responsibility.

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Picture 53

The urban boy Gao Zeye.

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Picture 54

The rural girl Siyin, 5-year-old.

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Picture 55

The rural boy Chen Yulin carrying firewood.

Picture 56

The urban boy Zhou Yunfeng driving a motorcycle.

¹²¹ However, the show, again, forgot to address that this rural family has been suffering the poverty for many years. What a tribulation it is for them.

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Picture 57

The urban boy Chen Junwei arrives in the Basha Miao village, next to him is the head of village.

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Picture 58

The rural boy Jingxiang, 5-year-old, working in the field with a special hoe made for him.

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Picture 59

The rural girl Wushuai

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Picture 60 The rural boy Xiaohei visits his father in the prison.

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Picture 61

The rural girl Hu Ruonan's father passing his mother a piece of cake, the subtitle says, 'Hu's father feels great grief and guilty.'

Picture 62

The urban boy Zhang Yuhan and his parents.

In the show, even prison is displayed as a form of warning. In *Youth don't be Sad*, the show introduces a rural boy, Xiaohei and his family's story. Xiaohei's father once went out for drink as he was in a bad mood, then he had a fight with a man and accidentally killed him. The father was then sentenced to 18 years in jail. By that time, Xiaohei was only five years old, and he hadn't seen his father for six years. In *Warm Pain*, the rural girl Hu Ruonan's father, is also a prisoner. His story is that he was angry with the village cadre, so he sold 1,000 sheep which belong collectively to the village. He was sentenced to 15

years in jail. Because the prison was very far away and the family was very poor, Hu Ruonan's grandparents hadn't seen their only son for more than 10 years. In the end, the urban youth Yi Huchen helped Xiaohai to visit his father in the prison (picture 60). Another urban youth Gong Weihua took out 3,000 RMB [£300] to help Hu Ruonan's entire family reunite at the prison (picture 61). The very sensational reunion scene is shown as a family tragedy. The rural criminal figures, in line with the stock urban discourse about rural people and their characteristics, also insinuate that poverty produces criminality. However, being sentenced to 15 years for selling 1,000 sheep is way too harsh, compared with the shocking corruption in a big city. The programme, once again, overlooks the reason for their depressing poverty, but only narrates the prison story as a warning. The poverty of the country life is only then connected to the possibility of suffering the fate of being a prisoner.

Overall, in the show, the countryside suggests a terrible situation. Poverty is taken as a form of warning, tragedy, and shame, not only for the farmers, yet for all Chinese, which would even challenge the legitimacy of the ruling party. It explains why the central government is keen to introduce market-driven economic reform, and it surely reaffirms the 'urgency and necessity' of 'urbanising' rural area as discussed in the previous chapter. As a result, living in the countryside, witnessing the rural people's fortitude, stoicism and altruism, seems to stimulate the 'bratty' urban youth to reflect on their own easy life and cherish the opportunity to study what many rural youth yearn for. As Zhang Yuhan (picture 62) writes in his diary,

I have thought about it for a long time and finally decided to restart from the second year of middle school, to live normal way of life. The road of life is not flat, what I have been following was like a craggy mountain road. Fortunately, I have already walked out of the foggy mountain, I have learned a lot, and I might have just got back on the right track during these days.

(HunanTV *TEP* Blog 2008)¹²²

Therefore, getting back to school becomes 'the normal way of life' and the correct way of getting rid of the fate of being poor.¹²³

Cultural Capital and Social Division

Getting back to school is interpreted as the most firm proof of the 'bratty' urban youth's transformation. The question centres on what makes it so important to get back to school. As psychologist Zhang Yiyun states in *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, 'by getting away from class, she/he is escaping from her/his responsibility.' This responsibility, I argue,

¹²² HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2008) 'Zhang Yuhan's thought after the show'. [online] available from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008uby.html#comment3 [1 April 2008]

¹²³ Additionally, in the urban school, a class meeting was always held and in which the visiting rural youth told the class his life story, such as in *Love Elsewhere*, *Warm Pain*, and *The Grid*. The endurance of rural youth and their dedication to study touched the urban classmates to tears, they all express their remorse and say that they will take the rural youth as a paragon, well-behave, cherish life, and work hard.

suggests that urban youth should prepare themselves for participating in advancing modernisation, which is the common goal, political mission, and public duty of all Chinese people.

Urban school, serving as it does as a representative of modernisation, is the place to offer urban youth suitable 'stratified' knowledge as their cultural capital. The education at school is now categorised as one instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc, which suits for the requirement of different jobs and positions in the production. Therefore, the knowledge not only serves industrial modernisation, but also determines the future social status of the youths. Getting back to urban school is seen as taking social responsibility in the way it has been determined for urban youth in the industrial mechanism. So that they may fit in the different social positions determined by their knowledge and their competence. As Bourdieu criticized, it is the 'academically guaranteed competence' (1998a:99) offered by the school education system which distinguishes the manager, technician and the ordinary worker within an enterprise, additionally, 'the occupational world, and by extension the whole social world, seems based on a ranking by 'competence', or, worse, of 'intelligence' (ibid).

Thus, it is pertinent to understand the difference between schools that urban youth and rural youth go to in the urban-rural divided China, which shows the difference of the knowledge it teaches. While urban youth go to high schools which have far better educational resources and aim at further university education, rural youth mostly go to vocational high schools set for manual factories, technical industries. The in-depth interview with C2 (3rd March 2011), a principal of one middle school for the children of migrant peasant workers, proves it, '80% or so of our students will go to vocational high schools, receive a vocational education. They could learn certain skills, such as cooking, clothes design, electronics, driving, or receive a training to be subway mechanics, traffic service employer, and so on.'

Both urban schools and rural schools teach know-how, but for different positions with different purposes. It suggests the different social role for urban youth and rural youth in the process of modernisation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the ten social strata are formulated based on the occupations and the possession of organisational, economic and cultural resources. Wang also argues, 'the Open Reform in China since 1978 is, to a certain extent, the specialisation of the division of labor and re-differentiation of social stratification' (2001:57). Therefore, most rural youth might only end up being one of strata seven through to ten. Urban schools, however, with its privileged resources, aim to nurture urban youth to become a member of strata one through to six. For example, the urban youth participants, who come from affluent managerial families, are expected to join the new managerial echelon in the future. A similar situation occurred in Russian schools in the 19th century. They only offered limited curriculum education for the poor (Berman 1982). Its purpose is either for a vocational education due to the demands of industrial production, or as a political means to win over the poor and keep them under control.

Cultural capital, therefore, is represented as the reason for the urban-rural divide. The political-economic reason causing the urban-rural divide is downplayed. As cultural capital becomes the main factor to determine youth's future social status, the urban-rural divide is transformed as determined by the difference of accessing the 'proper', 'high-end' culture. This situation is similar to what Skeggs observes in British makeover RTV. For Skeggs, Wood, and Palmer as well, makeover RTV has become what Bourdieu termed a 'taste-maker' (1984:91), which rearticulates class divisions and patriarchal structures as issues of lifestyle choice. It is class divisions drawn by means of taste distinction. Besides, the middle class is occupying the position of being superb, watching, evaluating and judging the working class as the incompetent. Therefore, it suggests a powerful class structure at work. For Skeggs, class struggle now takes a new form by means of accessing to resources, the ability to appropriate, or in her term, 'propertise' them, and apply them to morally evaluate and judge other's subjectivity, 'culture is converted into a property right at the expense of the person who cannot hold these rights to culture' (2005:972).

In her discussion, cultural capital mainly points to cultural values, Skeggs believes that her class analysis suggests 'a reversal of Marx, moving beyond (but still with) the economic--perceived to be a discursive system---into understanding value more generally to understand how class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realised (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange' (ibid:969). However, she seems to fall back on to Williams and Thompson's culturalist paradigm, which gives cultural consciousness and experience so pivotal a place in the analysis. It needs to be noted that the discourses about cultural values and taste are produced by a stratified society, not the other way around. Such discourses help to maintain the position of judgment. Alternatively, we could say, the distinct meaning of lifestyle choices has already been sutured by the traditional categories, which are mainly defined by the economic structures of class inequality. Therefore, Palmer is correct in commenting that the taste hierarchies contribute to maintain the economic structures of class inequality. The taste hierarchies are legitimised by the middle-class style that these shows advocate, with an intention to downplay the political-economic reasons causing class inequality. Therefore, for Palmer, the significance of lifestyle RTV 'may lie in the ways in which it helps to mould and to legitimise our class membership' (2004:189).

Cultural capital, as Bourdieu defined it (1986), consists in forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. This cultural capital suggests the knowledge determining the roles in production, therefore, reproduces and maintains the relations of production and the urban-rural class disparity. However, it cannot be forgotten that the cause of the inequality of accessing cultural capital is the inequality of the urban-rural economic status. Emphasising cultural capital is just a way to downplay, camouflage the political economic reason causing the urban-rural disparity at the first place. In addition, it intends to calm the rural people by asserting that 'modern knowledge changes fate' (see more discussion in next chapter). Therefore, my class analysis in this case is not suggesting a reversal of Marx; it is still with (but also

moves beyond) the economic. Class divisions drawn by means of cultural capital should be seen as a continuation of the class divisions caused by the economic.

Allegorically Reading and Original Culture

In *TEP*, urban youth is depicted as modern, civilised, good nature but damaged. The damaged urban youth, in the description of the opening sequence of the 5th Season, is connected through allegory to the damaged city. As the voiceover puts it,

One day, if my **dream** was drenched by rain, would you like to give me a hand?
If one day, I have no stamina to move ahead, would you like to accompany me
for a warm afternoon?.....if it was a **home** you are not familiar with, would you
find it by listening to your good heart as signpost?.....if he was the future of a
nation, would you make him sleep tight without feeling lost? *The Exchange
Programme*, a source of strength from the depths of distant mountains.

As Fredric Jameson said, 'allegory' refers to the 'symbolic narrative' in which the major features of the narrative are held to refer symbolically to some action or situation (1986:65-88). Allegorically, 'I', is the 'bratty' urban youth and also signifies the damaged city, which are 'the future of a nation'. 'I+You' is suggesting the 'dream' of being modern, civilised, noble, kind-hearted, stoical and responsible, possessing both capitalist prosperity and socialist morality. When 'I' have no stamina to move ahead, 'You' can give me a hand. 'You' signifies the distant countryside and its socialist, communist culture. City identifies itself as the modern one with good nature. City might get lost, forget its socialist origin, or 'decadent' while practicing the neoliberal market-driven economy. However, listen to its 'good heart', it can find its way back to the 'home', the rural cradle of socialist, communist culture, and be spiritually awoken. It reveals that *TEP* consciously, unconsciously thinks that the city, in the Chinese context, has a socialist origin located in the countryside. The ideological figure of the countryside in the Chinese context implies the suture of the master signifier, socialism. In *TEP*, city and country are designated as reflecting the ideological contradiction between the neoliberal market, as the latest form of capitalism, and socialism. The city is expected to regulate the individual, competition centred market by the socialist culture originated in the countryside. Once the cruelty of the neoliberal market is under control, its obverse consequences, such as the 'decadence', the rich-poor, urban-rural divide, are expected to be gone as well. The possibility is indicated through presenting the transformed urban youth after sending them back to the countryside.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the social Darwinist context triggers the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity, which 'in present circumstances create fertile ground for a sentimental longing for the past, or for a past fondly reconstructed out of selectively idealised features' (Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley 2006:925). In this situation, Chinese People are longing for an imagined, organic, and socialist past----the era of Chairman Mao. This nostalgia actually expresses a desire for egalitarianism in today's society, the same desire as being manifested in the talent shows. The countryside, as the

old revolutionary base, reminds people of an era without the polarised disparity between rich and poor. By that time, CPC enacted sweeping Land Reform during which the lands of landlords and aristocrats were confiscated and equally redistributed to the peasants. The landlord class and the feudal aristocracy were overthrown. The farmers were liberated from heavy exploitation. It was a period without the economic disparity, and individual/market competition of the present day. Therefore, though the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity is fertile ground to trigger the nostalgia, but immediately locating the countryside as the 'egalitarian place' just proves the existence of an implicit, pre-comprehension of the countryside.

This perception of the countryside explains that why *TEP* particularly chooses the old revolutionary base areas as the shooting locations in season two, three, four, five and six. These places have certain political messages or connections with the Red Army, nationalism, and patriotism. For instance, Wan Quan River of Hainan province is famous for a song, *I Love Five Fingers Mountain, I Love Wan Quan River*, and a story, *The Red Detachment of Women*, which also gives praise to the Red Army. As the voiceover says, 'the place represents that the Hainan people support the people's army.' Huining county of Gansu province, is the location where the Red Army joined forces in October 1936 which symbolises the victory of the Long March of the Red Army in exile; 'it has a magnificent superb beauty.' Jia county, which is located in the north of Shanxi province, is the central part of the Loess Plateau and the famous old revolutionary base area. It is also the birthplace of a famous song *The East is Red*, which gives praise for Chairman Mao and CPC.

During the Chinese Civil War, the Red Army built a harmonious, solidly united relationship with the farmers by living an impoverished life together, struggling hard and supporting each other. It was the shared experience unifying the Red Army and the farmers. Thus, in the long-term socialist discourse, the experience shared by the rural people and the Red Army are proposed as being excellent and noble. As Hu jingtao, ex-General Secretary of the CPC, asserts in the EHES: 'Honor to those who uphold hard struggle, and shame on those who indulge in a dissipated life; Honor to those who unite and help people, and shame on those who gain at the expense of others.' The experience of rural life is bound to contain strenuous agricultural labour. It is taken as a symbol of struggling hard. As agriculture is mainly kept outside of the competition-centred market economy, the people living at subsistence level still support each other as in the past, which is taken as a symbol of collectivism, altruism, and solidarity. It is the nature of the countryside which determines the activities the urban youth engage in and experience. The countryside, as a signifier, has already been sutured by the master signifiers socialism and communism for a very long time. The countryside is then taken in *TEP* as the 'root' where the nation's 'original culture' comes from. *TEP* can be seen as the journey of seeking socialist original culture in an idealised rural setting. In fact, returning to the countryside and tracing the original culture can all be seen as the materialisation of the belief, which supports and indicates the unconscious, spontaneous, pre-comprehension of the countryside.

Finally, city, as a signifier in the Chinese context, is sutured by neoliberalism, as it is dominated by the doctrine of the neoliberal market, which stimulates fierce competition, possessive individualism, extreme materialistic behaviour, and eventually the alienation of the human being. As Zhang Zhen says, 'old communities of commerce and culture have been torn down to give way to expressways, subway stations, corporate buildings and shopping malls---all in the wake of a ruthlessly advancing market economy and the incursion of global capitalism' (2007:3). To some extent, the damaged urban youth who indulges in a dissipated life, signifies the damaged city. When the damaged urban youth is depicted as having the courage to change and to learn from country life to be stoic, altruistic, and responsible, this also states the wish of the city.

What comes next is the hegemonic struggle. It is the socialist original culture resisting the neoliberal idea pervasive in the city, intending to 'appropriate' city or at least hybridise it in the fight of discursive hegemony. The ideological figure of the city, therefore, is transforming and hybridising continually in the process of endless negotiation. The city becomes a 'third space' of culture and discourse, which, according to Robert Young, 'is not a space, or a location. It is a field domain which cannot be located by GPS on a map, and it has no zip code' (2009:81). The dynamics of this 'third space' and its openness force the cultural factors involved to improvise, to fight each other at any time. In the Chinese context, the most dominant cultural factors involved at this particular moment are the socialist ideology and the neoliberal one as its rival. The city is in a process of continuous transformation and constant reorientation. Anything that hasn't happened before will probably happen soon. There is always change and the possibility of change. However, the end goal is firmly reflected in the idealised identity of urban people as being modern and moral.

The City as a 'Third Space'

In China, the issue of a city's identity starts from Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase (1992), 'what does it matter if it is a white cat or a black cat as long as it catches mice?' It suggests the situation of introducing the market economy in socialist China. However, it is Lenin who firstly rationalised the contradictory situation. As Zizek puts it,

In his wonderful short text 'Notes of a Publicist'--written in February 1922 when the Bolsheviks, after winning the Civil War against all odds, had to retreat into the New Economic Policy of allowing a much wider scope to the market economy and private property--Lenin uses the analogy of a climber who must backtrack from his first attempt to reach a new mountain peak to describe what retreat means in a revolutionary process, and how it can be done without opportunistically betraying the cause. (2009:43)

Thus, CPC has been advocating the market-driven economic reform to conquer poverty, to finish building the foundations of a socialist economy, and to avoid the hostile powers of capitalism to subvert its authority.

In this, with the West as the only reference to catch up on modernisation, the city in the Chinese context is practicing mimicry by advancing the idea of the neoliberal market. The new, the modern, and the city with skyscrapers become synonyms for each other in present day China. Urbanisation has gained splendid success, the city stands out as a powerful tribe, a civilised world with material prosperity. However, competitive, possessive individualism inevitably causes mercenary attitude, the alienation of people, and 'the atrophy and degeneration of human nature' (Wang Anyi 2001). As a result, it is the damaged city speaking from a slippery position. Whilst the West confirms their 'advance and superiority' (Said 1999:2) with the East as reference, the city tries to cut off the connection with the underdeveloped countryside and identify with the West as if it belongs to the same powerful group together with western modern states. Here, the attitude of hubris and arrogance of the Hong Kong Chinese towards the mainlanders can be a comparable reference to look at. In his article, Martin Jacques says, 'the Hong Kong Chinese looked down on the mainlanders as poor, ignorant and uncouth peasants, as greatly their inferior. They preferred—up to a point—to identify with westerners rather than mainlanders...primarily because of money and the status that went with it' (The Guardian 2014)¹²⁴ Similarly, the city has been the beneficiary of the market economy, and the urban dwellers come to enjoy a much higher standard of living than that of the peasants. Therefore, they look down on the peasants and identify with Westerners. However, in the face of the West and its capitalism, the city, as in a socialist state, also has to insist its socialist identity and considers itself as a strong, revolutionary communist entity. It suggests that the Chinese city has to ideologically deny the West and its capitalist values.

In order to maintain the legitimacy of its socialist identity, the Chinese city needs to construct itself as a reformed, recognisable, but modern other, 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994:86). Only in this condition, the legitimacy of the expanding neoliberal urbanisation is also maintained. The city is allowed to mimic the modern look, to play the neoliberal market game, but it must reaffirm the socialist values and morality, 'mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal' (ibid). Doing so, the city aims to weaken the domination of the individual-centred neoliberalism, as the latest form of capitalism, in the Chinese context. Mimicry is used as a technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare, 'it is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled' (Lacan 1977:99), to protect itself and to threaten the enemy. Additionally, as Bhabha states, 'the mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (1994:86). It is consciously/unconsciously adopted as a strategy for the central government to deal with the threat of neoliberal globalisation, which they have to follow because they think that they have no choice. It is precisely the connotation of what Harvey called 'neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics' (2005) at the level of ideology.

¹²⁴ Jacques, M.(2014) 'China is Hong Kong's future--not its enemy'. *The Guardian* [online] 30 september. available from<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/30/china-hong-kong-future-protesters-cry-democracy>> [30 September 2014]

Finally, the countryside is taken as the place where the revolutionary strength and original culture comes from. The city has to review and rely on the rural-Red Army culture to fight against, hybridise with, and melt down the capitalist ideas. This is the firm gesture that a socialist city and state should insist on, in order to maintain its legitimacy. Therefore, *TEP* can be held as allegorically revealing the continuing changing and rewriting of the 'hybridity' of the city, with the latter becoming a battle field, a 'third space' of culture and discourse, in which the countryside acts as the nation's 'original culture'. It suggests the process of the hybridisation, the hegemonic struggles between capitalist and socialist.

However, it also needs to be noted that legitimising mimicry in this way might risk the formulation of an inner subjective attitude, which would offer the centralist government an inner subjective belief to hold on to and an excuse to advance the neoliberal market even more boldly. As Fisher comments,

Capitalist ideology in general, Zizek maintains, consists precisely in the overvaluing of belief--in the sense of inner subjective attitude--at the expense of the beliefs we exhibit and externalise in our behavior. So long as we believe (in our hearts) that capitalism is bad, we are free to continue to participate in capitalist exchange. (2009:13)

This is the disavowal upon which the behavior relies----we are able to fetishize the neoliberal market in our actions only because we have already taken an ironic distance towards it in our heads. Therefore, the construction of an idealised urban youth in the discourse might lead to a potential cynicism, as Fisher describes, 'we could have left-wing convictions, and a left-wing self-image, provided these didn't impinge on work in any significant way' (2013:91). This structure of disavowal would become an ideological trap of capitalism that the central government might would feel happy to fall into, as 'the very privileging of 'inner' subjective states over the public was itself an ideological move'(ibid). In addition, the role of capitalist ideology is precisely 'to conceal the fact that the operations of capital do not depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief' (Fisher 2009:12-3).

Therefore, we are facing an important question, if the socialist original culture is going to end up functioning the same as socialist morality, does this do nothing but deepen cynicism? Alternatively, is it an efficient resistance to neoliberal market? I argue, if it was only the resistance at the level of culture and discourse, then it would deepen cynicism as discussed in the previous chapter, however, we must see that returning to the countryside is a piece of practical action which manifests a materialised belief. According to Zizek, 'belief, far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always materialised in our effective social activity' (1989:33). In addition, the materialised belief is supporting fantasy, 'the external custom is always a material support for the subject's unconscious' (ibid:39). The fantasy here, I argue, suggests an overlooked, unconscious illusion of the countryside; the implicit, pre-comprehension of the countryside. In other words, the ideological figure of the countryside suggests an 'ideological fantasy' (ibid:30). The stake

of social-ideological fantasy, as Žižek states, 'is to construct a vision of society which does exist, a society which is not split by an antagonistic division, a society in which the relation between its parts is organic, complementary' (ibid:126).

Countryside as 'Ideological Fantasy'

As said in Chapter 2, in anti-Semitism, the Jew becomes 'an external element, a foreign body introducing corruption into the sound social Fabric' (Žižek 1989:142). The social crisis becomes the result of the interference of an external factor. The social structural antagonism of Nazi German society at that time was transformed into the racial difference. It implicates that the internal structural limit is symbolised and transformed into an external restraint or obstacle. As Žižek says, "Jew" is a fetish which simultaneously denies and embodies the structural impossibility of 'Society': it is as if in the figure of the Jew this impossibility had acquired a positive, palpable existence' (ibid). It clarifies that the ideological fantasy operates as 'giving 'body' to and symbolising the impossible limit, the abyss into something forbidden' (Žižek 2004:62-4, trans. by Ji Guangmao).

Therefore, the notion of social fantasy is a necessary counterpart to the concept of antagonism, 'fantasy is precisely the way the antagonistic fissure is masked. In other words, fantasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance' (Žižek 1989:142). This structural antagonism in the Chinese context is taking the form of the antagonism between rich and poor, urban and rural, which implies class antagonism. However, for the purpose of harmonious society and a popular alliance, rural people cannot be refused or ejected like the Jew in anti-Semitism. Neither can they be ironically taken as a weight on the economy. It is agriculture products that support the original capital accumulation of urban industrialisation and grain supply. The peasants are actually producers of state wealth. In this, we see two approaches applied to suture the urban-rural divide. Firstly, at the level of consciousness and reason, cultural capital is applied to explain the situation of the urban-rural disparity, with an intention to catalyse the common-sense assertion of 'modern knowledge changes fate' (see next chapter), and this strategy is for calming the rural poor. Secondly, at the level of the unconscious, returning to the countryside and mobilising the original culture are seen as ways to resist the obverse consequences of introducing the neoliberal market. Doing so, the ideological contradiction between neoliberalism and socialism seems to be solved, as indicated by the transformed 'perfect' urban youth.

Returning to the countryside and mobilising the original culture reveal the existence of the countryside fantasy. In fact, practice such as 'Down to the Countryside Movement' that happened in the Mao era¹²⁵, 'returning to the countryside' in *TEP*, ideologically supporting countryside and rural people, philanthropic activities voluntarily conducted by the urban dwellers, even the state's plan of constructing 'a new socialist countryside', can all be seen as manifesting, materialising a collective unconscious, pre-comprehension of the countryside in the Chinese context. The countryside fantasy manifests itself through a

¹²⁵ Wikipedia(2014) *Down to the Countryside Movement*. [online] available from
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_to_the_Countryside_Movement>[6 October 2014]

series of practical actions, and functions as being able to regulate the neoliberal market and its obverse consequences. Doing so, it functions as a protective screen to mask the antagonistic fissure between rich and poor, urban and rural. For the urban people, they are now released from suffering the inconsistency of the ideological system caused by the contradiction. It explains the reason for the public praising of Hunan TV for fulfilling its media responsibility, which 'marks the eruption of enjoyment in the social field' (Žižek 1989:142). The spectre of the real, the impossibility of social antagonism is reflected in the fantasy of the countryside, as a positive, palpable existence, to mask the impossibility. In summary, the ideological fantasy of countryside transform the social divide into a new level of equilibrium, a sutured totality.

Fantasy constitutes the frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful. As Žižek argues,

Ideology, in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualised by Laclau and Mouffe as 'antagonism'¹²⁶: a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolised). (1989:45)

In the Chinese context, this kernel manifests itself through the urban-rural, rich-poor divide. Through the countryside fantasy, we live in a seamless society, which rejects the traumatic kernel, adapts the current situation and offers us a vision of society in the future. The countryside fantasy is for Chinese people to experience a society in which the relationship between socialism and the neoliberal market is 'organic and complementary'. Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality: it is a social existence and regulates social reality.

Countryside Fantasy as 'Socialist Legacy'

It must be noted that the countryside is not contingently picked up to play the role of being the 'countryside', as the Jew was contingently picked up to play the role of being the 'Jew' in the system of anti-Semitism. The countryside has historical and economic factor that ties it to socialism, as well as having an unique nature. For example, agriculture is run by the socialist planned economy, the agri-land collectively belongs to the peasants and the village. The Collective Land Ownership System is an outcome of the planned economy era. Besides, the nature of countryside is determined by the agricultural labour and agricultural economy, which suggests hard working, communal dependence and economic frugality. Therefore, the countryside fantasy is more than a result of a

¹²⁶ Laclau and Mouffe state, 'the social only exists as a partial effort for constructing society----that is, an objective and closed system of differences----antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not internal but external to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself' (1985:125).

structural 'misrecognition' (Zizek 1989:19)¹²⁷ or substitution. I argue, the implicit, pre-comprehension of the countryside simultaneously suggests the persistent existence of the socialist legacy.

My statement can be proved by the audience's 'savvy stance' towards the transformation of the 'bratty' urban youth. As a netizen puts it, 'I am wondering, how much would seven days experience impact on their behaviour and habits in the future? Would seven days experience really be able to change these urban youth and the way they have been living for the past dozen years?' (1 August 2007).¹²⁸ In my focus group interview, the group members raise the same concern about the durability of the 'bratty' urban youth's transformation after the show. However, though the audience have doubts about the durability, depth, and staying power of the experience gained in the countryside, they still believe that these urban youth are going to change, just to different extents. As ay3, a member of group A(Y), says, 'I'd like to send my son to countryside for a month or so, it must have good influence on him sooner or later.' For Zizek, he would argue that it is not the audiences who believe in the transformation, it is 'countryside', on behalf of the audience, believing in 'returning to the countryside would make everything right'. Therefore, what Sloterdijk said 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it' should be interpreted as 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it' (Zizek 1989:30). What Zizek contends is true in the Western context. However, there is more than meets the eye in the Chinese context. It is the nature of the countryside, such as strenuous labour, communal dependence and economic frugality, which determines the activities the urban youth engages in and experiences, and the impact. The perception of the countryside is formulated in the course of proletarian revolution and the practice of the planned economy. From this perspective, the countryside itself is the heritage of proletarian revolution and socialism.

Further, the countryside fantasy continues the struggle between socialism and neoliberalism at the level of the unconscious. The reason for saying that is because the countryside fantasy makes socialist ideology 'the 'spontaneous' ideology at work at the heart of social 'reality' itself' (Zizek 1994a:8), i.e. ideology in-and-for itself. It suggests that it is not any more the socialist morality (ideology in-itself) fighting the neoliberal market (ideology in-and-for itself). It is socialist ideology in-and-for itself fighting the neoliberal market. The meaning of its struggle in the city as a 'third space' is not going to be limited at the level of culture and discourse, its resisting, regulating, hybridising the cruelty and immorality of the neoliberal market is supported by a range of practices as the materialised belief. In other words, fighting the market is not going to be in vain. The

¹²⁷ Misrecognition, as Zizek says, 'concerns the relation between a structured network and one of its elements: what is really a structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements, appears as an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also belongs to it outside its relation with other elements' (1989:19). The misrecognition of commodity results in the fetishism.

¹²⁸ *Bingtanghulu* Blog (2006) 'The Poor Gao Zhanxi, the Odious Hunan TV'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_55c8d83b010005xg.html>[23 September 2006]. See partial translation in Appendix 2.

countryside fantasy and the practices premised on it, at the level of the unconscious, are the dynamic to confront the market.

Zizek argues that 'China is today the ideal capital state: freedom for the capital, with state doing the 'dirty job' of controlling the workers.everything subordinated to the ruthless drive to develop and become the new superpower' (2002:146-47). However, I argue that it might be a rash conclusion, as we cannot overlook the existence of the socialist legacy. The market and the socialist legacy are in a constant hegemonic struggle at the level of the unconscious, though cynicism is an undeniable fact and a morally sound market is just a dream.

Conclusion

By sending the 'bratty' urban youth to the countryside, *TEP* depicts a transformed 'perfect' urban youth. Most importantly, 'returning to the countryside' reveals the countryside fantasy beneath it. Due to the existence of this fantasy, socialist ideology can be an ideology in-and-for itself, which means that fighting the market is not going to be a vain try. Based on the analysis in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, it can be concluded that CRTV becomes a critique of the neoliberal market in a situation where that version of capitalism is being developed in China. In fact, *TEP* goes further by practicing a form of materialised belief, which supports the countryside fantasy.

Besides, as Jameson states, it is important to recognise the utopian impulses in cultural texts, 'the expression of a fantasy of collective solidarity, social harmony and classlessness that is both an imagined alternative to and a faint criticism of the existing social order' (1981:286-92, quoted in Kotsopoulos 2001:1). Indeed, this utopian impulse, manifested by the depiction of an idealised urban youth, suggests the desire for an affluent, modern, and communist society. By presenting this as an assured future, the programme can be seen as functioning to solve the contradiction between the neoliberal market and socialism. Simultaneously, this idealised identity at the level of discourse represents a faint criticism of the neoliberal order, but what effectively resists the neoliberal market at the level of the unconscious is the countryside fantasy.

As Zizek states, "going through' the social fantasy is likewise correlative to identification with a symptom' (1989:143). In the next chapter, I argue, the first rural youth participant in *TEP*, Gao zhanxi, is the symptom traversing the countryside fantasy, therefore, proving again the existence of the countryside fantasy. In addition, Gao represents the universal hybridity. How the countryside fantasy appears as common sense will be discussed as well.

Chapter Six

Who are We?

----Traversing the Fantasy and Universal Hybridity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argue, there is a countryside fantasy functioning at the level of the unconscious. In this chapter, I argue, the countryside fantasy appears as common sense, which expresses itself as a simple moral judgment, in the familiar language of daily life. These two common-sense assertions, clarified by analysing audience comments, interviews, are: a) returning to the rural home proves that he is still a good boy; b) rural youths are usually purer. They lead to the formation of a negotiated consensus that rural youth is a moral paragon on the condition that he/she returns to his/her rural village. However, it is different that how the social fantasy respectively captures the urban and rural audience's enjoyments during the formation of this consensus.

Before his deciding to return to the rural village, the first rural youth participant in *TEP*, Gao Zhanxi, is depicted as ignorant, uncivil, easily 'depraved' by material comfort, in other words, having forgotten his origin. I argue, the representation of Gao Zhanxi suggests that the show demonstrates the 'othering'. The 'other' is the person on whom urban people put their dreams and their nightmares. The assertion of 'returning to countryside proves that he is still a good boy' is another way of rejecting the rural as the 'other'. The rural poor are seen as stealing or threatening the urban people's enjoyment once they come to a city. This is how the social fantasy captures the urban people's jouissance. Compared to the urban audiences, the rural audiences are more inclined to repeat 'rural youths are usually purer'. By analysing interviews with the rural audience, what is revealed is how the social fantasy produces their jouissance. The end result is that rural youth is represented in *TEP* as opening his horizons, but willingly returning to the impoverished countryside, hence, a moral paragon who has not forgotten his roots.

Further, combined textual analysis with the audience interviews, I argue that Gao Zhanxi is the symptom. A symptom, as Žižek argues, 'is an element which----although the non-realisation of the universal principle in it appears to hinge on contingent circumstances----has to remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate' (1997:127). In fact, the existence of Gao not only destroys the consensus about the universal of rural youth being a 'moral paragon', but itself represents the universal. To different extents, we are all 'Gao Zhanxi', with our identities in the endless process of hybridising. Additionally, the ethnic minority rural youth are also required to step into hybridisation and modernisation, to give up their cultural 'provincialism' and 'rejectionism'¹²⁹ (Samuel Huntington

¹²⁹ Though Huntington's explanation of 'rejectionism', 'Kemalism', and 'reformism' are quoted in this thesis, I disagree with his opinion as to the end of ideology.

1996:72). In the view of the government, China is pursuing modernisation from a reformist position. The common-sense assertion of 'modern knowledge changes fate' is shaped against this backcloth, as it is no harm to Chinese culture. Significantly, the countryside fantasy supports the notion of 'reformism' (ibid) in the course of modernisation.

As Zizek states, "going through' the social fantasy is likewise correlative to identification with a symptom' (1989:143). In order to clarify Gao Zhanxi as the symptom, this chapter places more attention to and starts with the analysis of the representation of Gao in the first episode *Internet Addiction (IA)*.

'Ignorant' Rural Youth

Gao Zhanxi (picture 63), as the first rural youth participant in *TEP*, is portrayed from the outset as an 'ignorant', uncivilised one. In *IA*, the show introduces Gao from the point of view of urban superiority. Gao's candor and lack of cultural capital has been stigmatised. As the voiceover says, 'firstly, he hardly knows the outside world, for example, he likes Andy Lau (entertainment star) and Zhao Benshan (skit star), but he actually couldn't tell which was which.' To prove this, the show offers a simple photo-name test. The shot juxtaposes a close-up of each star on which the names were written the wrong way round by Gao. That he cannot identify the entertainment stars seems to prove Gao's ignorance. However, the fact is, it is not because Gao would not like to acknowledge the entertainment industry and the commercial society represented by the entertainment stars, it is because urban commercial popular culture abandons this backward barren land and its people. This also explains that why the first experience arranged for Gao in the city is consumption. Consumer culture is the first step of transformation as the rural people move into a city. Unfortunately, Gao is named 'Gao nit' (muddled Gao) by the show before his transformation. The voiceover continues, 'secondly, he says that his biggest flaw is gluttony, as it seems he never feels full.' Hunger is depicted as the greed of this boy who suffers from malnutrition (picture 64). The serious problem of subsistence living is sidestepped. Next, 'he is whining a lot, whining about his 1 yuan (10pence) pocket money per month for stationery, he says that he couldn't even afford a steamed bread, therefore, he often drifts off in a class and dreams about earning lots of money.' In the interview, Gao says, 'my family is the poorest in the village. I feel like I am very incompetent. Once I think about my family situation, I can't focus on study, I think a lot. I sometimes complain to mom and dad of having no money to buy me stuff.' He is frankly talking about hard facts, the economic pressure on his family and his helplessness. The show however directly refers to it as his dislike for his poor family, moreover, conveys the impression that he is a bit materialistic. It is taken as proving his insatiable desire which counters the saying 'happiness consists in contentment'. The voiceover continues, 'fourthly, he likes to beat his younger brother, because he is angry that his brother doesn't like to study, the reason seems valid', nevertheless, beating other people is not a good civilised behavior.

Ignorant, greedy, whining and beating people, these four labels, which can be categorised into three aspects----culture, behaviour and morality, construct the primary image of Gao.

This image reflects the stigmatisation and stereotyping of the rural group in various media's discourses (Li and Qiao 2005). The editor tries to distinguish himself/herself as a modern urban person, who understands consumer culture, from the rural youth as the uncivilised, 'ignorant' other. It suggests, as discussed in the previous chapter, that the city tries to cut off historical ties with the underdeveloped countryside by designating the countryside as the 'other'. By doing so, city expects to establish its new identity as belonging to the same modern group as western countries. Thus, rural youth, as the representative of the old rural China, is rejected as the 'ignorant and uncivilised' other.

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Picture 63 Gao says, 'I can't focus on study, once I think about my family's poverty' (subtitle).

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Picture 64 Gao suffers from malnutrition.

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Picture 65 Gao receives £20 pocket money from his new urban mum.

Picture 66 Gao returns to his rural village with a new urban look.

'Decadent' Rural Youth

The next part of the show is about bringing Gao to a big city, Changsha, where Gao is portrayed as being easily 'depraved' by material comfort and forgetting his origin. In *IA*, the opening sequence introduces Gao as follows, 'he, a rural youth from Qinghai, who complains about his impoverished family, and wants to conquer a city by studying.' It implies from the beginning that Gao dislikes his origin, as 'family' is the signifier of one's origin, of the place and background where one comes from. Therefore, the question is raised by the show, 'seven days later, would he still like to return to his rural village?' This question suggests the concern that Gao may forget his roots which would be seen as a reason to bring shame on himself. It is more likely to be an affirmative assumption that the rural youth would be seduced by urban material prosperity, indulge in hedonism, and give up virtue. Thus, it was arranged for him to travel by airplane, experience a BMW, receive a

makeover, enjoy a sumptuous meal and go shopping. After arriving at his new family's duplex, Gao immediately gets 200RMB [£20] pocket money from his new rich parents (picture 65). Where after, Gao gradually learns how to spend money, buy nibbles, play computer games, watch TV and go sightseeing in the park. It is taken as the evidence that he has been corrupted by hedonism, which implies that he has changed his nature, no more a pure simple rural youth with a goal. As the voiceover claims, 'the problem is that the cutie Gao now has a temporary amnesia, he has forgotten his previous plan, such as visiting a library and book stores.' When Gao spends 3RMB [30 pence] to take a tourist car in a theme park, the voiceover says, '3RMB sounds cheap and acceptable, even though his pocket money is usually only 1RMB per month.' Gao is actually condemned for being a consumer, but it was the show itself who gave Gao £20 pocket money and expected him to receive the transformation of consumer culture. In addition, he is only doing what everyone else in the city does or aspires to do.

Gao is accused of this so-called 'corruption' by both the editor and the audience. According to editor Liu Xuebo,

Gao gradually adapts to his new urban life and becomes a bit slick. He learns how to bargain with peddlers. He is acting smart, addicted to computer games and even plays jokes on us. But, more and more, day by day, we just don't like this new Gao Zhanxi. He seems addicted to city life.

(HunanTV *TEP* Blog 2006)¹³⁰

The most appalling moment happens in the fourth day of Gao's stay in Changsha. A door-to-door salesman came over when Gao was alone in his new urban family's home.¹³¹ This salesman started conversation by asking Gao Zhanxi what his surname is. Instead of saying that it is Gao, Gao Zhanxi replied that it is Wei. Soon after, Gao was blamed by much of the audience for using the surname of the urban family with whom he was staying. Most of the audience are convinced that he has forgotten his roots¹³². In the personal Blog, *Bingtanghulu* (2006-09-23) comments, 'Gao Zhanxi disappointed me very much. He changes far more quickly than I expected, far too quickly.'¹³³ Gao's rapid change seems prove that he is the susceptible and weak individual who could easily succumb to material hedonism.

It is important to understand that the criticism of Gao is actually related to the nature of the city. In a city, 'older notions of communal dependence and economic frugality have

¹³⁰ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2006) 'Editor's Diary----Liu Xuebo'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd1010006j6.html> [11 October 2006]

¹³¹ It is highly suspicious that the visit of this door-to-door salesman was arranged by the production team in advance.

¹³² It needs to be noted that some of audience suspect and recognise the show's particular agenda of stigmatisation. As contributor *Shenwutongjue* puts it, 'subtitle deliberately highlighted this scene, implying that Gao had forgotten his surname. That was so mean.'

¹³³ See Appendix 2.

given way to newer, impermanent ideas about cosmopolitan autonomy and personal spending gleaned from television, film' (Keith Wagner 2013:362). To experience the modern facilities and the plenty of material civilisation, Gao has to be engaged in the enjoyment of consumption and the desirable life-style, which is called 'hedonism'. Besides, Gao was not given the chance to go to urban school to experience the more advanced education. Therefore, Gao is criticized for being a consumer, for accepting the transformation of consumer culture (picture 66). In this sense, the audience's criticism or praise is not about rural youth or urban youth, but about the nature of the different values and life-styles, about the alienation resulting from urbanisation, and the partially imagined, organic, and socialist past. Country and city are designated as representing the contradiction between the socialist, which stresses collectivism, altruism, and egalitarianism and late capitalism, which highlights possessive individualism, consumer culture, and market forces. When the urban people condemn Gao for steeping himself in consumer culture, it is actually the urban people condemning the damaged city in which they are living. The urban people require rural youth to mimic the modern urban look and accept the transformation of urban culture, but never to forget his roots. It reflects their own wish, for a city to mimic the West economically but never forget socialism and what is seen as its original culture. As discussed in the previous chapter, the countryside functions as an ideological fantasy, *TEP* tries to wake up 'bratty' urban youths by sending them back to the countryside. It is here, when the countryside fantasy appears as a common-sense assertion, 'returning to his rural village would prove that he is still a good rural boy', who has not forgotten his roots.

Returning to the Countryside as Redemption

When Gao was playing in the theme park, 84% of the audience who called the hot-line forecast that Gao would not like to return to his rural village.¹³⁴ The presenter declares, 'it concerns most audiences that Gao would forget his origins.' The production team has the same concern, 'for six days, we ask Gao every day if he misses his rural Family. His answer is always 'No'. Our previous concern gradually becomes true: Gao doesn't want to go back home. How could we end the show?'¹³⁵

Day seven, the night before Gao is due to return to his rural village, Wei's father suggests that he stays in Changsha for one more day. Gao happily accepts the invitation. The same day in the rural village, Gao's father sprains his ankle by carrying water for Wei to take a shower. In the interview, Li Hongli, the producer at that time, says that the production team have been blocking all the news from each family about what was happening on each side. However, as Gao does not want to leave the city, they 'have racked the brains to think how to make Gao to leave voluntarily' (Sina 2006).¹³⁶ On that day, Li Hongli decided to leak

¹³⁴ For the season one, there was a hot-line set up by the show for the active audience to answer the questions raised by the presenter, such as offering their opinion or predicting if the rural youth would like to return to his village after several days staying in the city.

¹³⁵ See note 130.

¹³⁶ Sina (2006) *Ordinary people's miracle life* [online] available from <http://ent.sina.com.cn/x/2006-09-30/03121269888.html> [30 September 2006]

the news about Gao's father's injury. After hearing the news, Gao immediately decides to cancel his one day extension plan and return to his hometown the next day. The editor Liu Xuebo asks him, 'didn't you say that you don't want to leave?' Gao answers, 'my wheat is ready to be reaped.' In his diary, Liu comments with a relief, 'all of a sudden, Gao regains his memory about his distant rural home' (HunanTV *TEP* Blog 2006). After Gao returns to the village (picture 66), the voiceover also delightedly declares, 'changing back into homemade cloth shoes, though still wearing the urban label T-shirt, Gao becomes the industrious, competent rural boy again.'

It is believed, by returning to the rural village, the rural youth proves that he hasn't forgotten his roots and his nature is intrinsically good, and can therefore be redeemed from being accused of 'indulging' himself in urban prosperity and being 'decadent'. Clearly, it is the urban people's fantasy being fulfilled. In the discussion follow up the *Bingtanghulu's* Blog, a contributor, *Xueshanfeixue*, says, 'when Gao got back home, he took off his new shoes, changed back to old cloth shoes and went to work in the field. I was truly touched by seeing these scenes...He is just a kid, but acting like a responsible adult.'¹³⁷ As another contributor, *Danfengqing*, puts it, 'has Gao really gone bad? I am afraid that the blogger haven't seen the ending part! When Gao heard about his father spraining his ankle, he immediately asked to get back home, when he got back home, he went to work in the field right away.' In my in-depth interview, an urban audience C3¹³⁸ also comments, 'when Gao got back home, he didn't forget that he was a *rural boy*, he picked up a hoe and worked in the field as usual, that means he didn't forget his responsibility, he is still a good boy.'

Returning to the rural village is believed as the only way to redeem Gao from being morally accused. Simultaneously, it also suggests a gesture of rejection, rejecting rural youth as the 'other' from entering a city, which is pertinent for understanding how the countryside fantasy captures the urban people's jouissance. As Žižek says, "Jew" is a fetish which simultaneously denies and embodies the structural impossibility of 'Society': it is as if in the figure of the Jew this impossibility had acquired a positive, palpable existence---and that is why it marks the eruption of enjoyment in the social field' (1989:142). In the Chinese context, the rural poor is picked up to play the role of being 'Jew', to be taken as stealing or threatening the urban people's enjoyment. Therefore, they are rejected as the other. 'Returning to the countryside would prove that he is still a good rural boy, who hasn't forgotten his roots' becomes a reason to be used to persuade rural people to withdraw themselves from the city. Most importantly, this common-sense assertion is there to enable urban people to deal with the 'issue' of rural people coming to their city. Common sense, as Gramsci argued, is always 'a response to certain problems posed by reality which are quite specific and 'original' in their relevance' (quoted in Hall and O'Shea 2013:9).¹³⁹ It is how the countryside fantasy appears as a common-sense

¹³⁷ In the discussion follow up the *Bingtanghulu's* blog. See Appendix 2.

¹³⁸ Female, 27 year-old, British MA, urban resident, clerk. See Appendix 1.

¹³⁹ Common sense is precisely 'a compendium of well-trying knowledge, customary beliefs, wise sayings,

assertion and captures the urban population's *jouissance*. As Kelsey Wood explains, 'we fantasise that we might have full *jouissance*, if only it weren't or some Other who steals or threatens our enjoyment' (2012:60).¹⁴⁰

Additionally, common sense, as Hall and O'Shea explains, 'is not the property of the rich, the well-educated or the powerful, but is shared to some extent by everybody, regardless of class, status, creed, income or wealth' (2013:9). Therefore, it is not surprising to see this apparently urban audiences' assertion resonates with the members of the Hangzhou focus group D (M)¹⁴¹ as well, in which four members are all from the rural area.

dm1: I don't like him at first, I think that he is a bit lazy, playing computer games, eating nibbles, and doesn't help with any chores. But, when he heard that his dad was injured, he immediately asked to go back home, at that time, he shows that he is still a good boy.

dm2: Yes, I agree.

dm4: Rural kids are usually *purer and simpler*.

In this exchange, though the previous assertion is still functioning to support their judgment, another common-sense assertion is clearly expressed----'rural youth are usually purer'. Rural youth is designated as a special. And this common-sense assertion resonates with the urban audience as well. For example, in the follow up blog, a contributor, *Chunbai*, says, 'the *special* precocity and self-esteem that *only* belongs to rural youth makes him well aware of his identity, that is why he finally gets back home, and changes his shoes, works in the field.' Furthermore, this common-sense assertion is a lead for us to understand how the countryside fantasy captures the rural people's enjoyment. The reason can be explored by analysing the following in-depth interview with a rural audience member D4.¹⁴²

D4: I don't like Gao and his behaviour in the city.

I: Why, because he has changed in the city?

D4: Yes. I don't like him.

popular nostrums and prejudices', and it 'draws on past ideas and traditions; but it also keeps evolving to give meaning to new developments, solve new problems, unravel new dilemmas' (Hall and O'Shea 2013:9). In this case, the past idea suggests another wise saying, 'it is good to keep in touch with your roots', which has been inflected to 'returning to the rural village proves that he is still a good rural boy, who hasn't forgotten his roots'. The root, as a signifier, surely has been sutured by master signifier socialism.

¹⁴⁰ Likewise, the values of West is taken as threatening Chinese culture, as discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁴¹ See Appendix 1.

¹⁴² Female, 22 year-old, university student. See Appendix 1.

I: So, you think that most of rural youth you know about, in your village, wouldn't change like that?

D4: No... I think that Gao's behaviour shows who he really is, wherever he lives, city or country, once he became rich, he would act like that. I think it is a bit weird to broadcast this episode.

I: Why? What makes you feel weird?

D4: Because I think that he is not a *good rural boy*.

I: So you are saying that the show should pick up only the good rural boy, as they did in season two, three and four? It seems that all the rural youth participants presented in those episodes are the good ones.

D4: Well, I think that those rural boys are materially poor but spiritually rich. Gao is spiritually 'poor' as well. He is a bit, maybe, spineless. But, can't blame him, he is still a little boy after all. But I just think that the show shouldn't have picked up him.

I: The show shouldn't choose him because he is not good enough? Has no educational value? He couldn't be a good role model?

D4: No, he isn't. He is not traditional enough. It is the first episode of the first season, but it was not the episode that I saw first. I watched some episodes of later seasons first, then I went back to watch this first episode. When I watched this one, I felt a little upset.

D4 sees Gao Zhanxi as an exception, as she wants it to be more constructed to fulfill the fantasy that rural youth is a 'traditional' moral paragon. Similarly, in the follow up blog, a contributor, *Haiyan*, directly states, 'Gao is not representative, he should not be seen as a representative of rural youth, he is very cunning, an exception.' In the discussion with the Wuhu focus group A(Y)¹⁴³, amongst these young members, two university students and one university graduate also try to eliminate Gao from rural youth group as an exception.

ay2: I don't like Gao zhanxi. I don't think he is a representative of rural youth.

ay1: I think that the nature of him is not good.

ay4: As I said earlier, Gao is, in fact, not a well-behaved boy. He should not waste money on buying nibbles, shopping in supermarkets or playing games in the theme park, your family is so poor, how come you could waste money?

Apparently, all of them try to eliminate Gao from 'traditional, good' rural youth group as an exception, which just makes Gao the symptom, 'the point of suspension of the universal

¹⁴³ See Appendix 1.

principle' (Zizek 1997:127). In fact, either confirming that Gao is still a good rural boy or eliminating Gao as an exception, both of them can be seen as defending, supporting the notion that rural youth are 'purer' and will never forget their origin. In this, the 'pure', the 'traditional' signifies the socialist morality. The rural people understand that they lack cultural capital in the city, hence, it is important for them to hold on to moral capital. This is how the countryside fantasy appears again as a common-sense assertion and captures the rural people's jouissance. It allows them to see the urban people as the morally weak 'other'. The 'rich' morality, the spiritual self-sufficiency stands as rural youth's only advantage when they enter a city, to deal with the personal turmoil, the affluence and the individual-competition-centred market forces as the poor. Again, common sense, is always a response to certain problems posed by reality in a specific context.¹⁴⁴

The countryside fantasy appears as common-sense assertions, but the way it captures the urban and rural people's jouissance places extra emphasis on very different aspects. The end result is a consensus that rural youth are moral paragons, who are spiritually strong, come to a city to open their horizons but willingly return to their impoverished countryside, as they do not forget their roots.

Rural Youth as Moral Paragons

As a consequence of this, *TEP* particularly chooses the 'traditional' rural youth from the old revolutionary base areas, and represents them as stoic, as a mature moral model. For example Shi Hongqiang (picture 67) from Jia county (*The Pain of Growing Up*), Li Bo from Huining county (*Father's Love Heavy as Mountain*). It is still arranged for them to experience consumer culture, such as shopping and parties, but they also go to school. Their lack of cultural capital is not stigmatised anymore. The recording of their raw emotions has been minimised. Their moral capital, such as being forbearing, never complaining, caring, hard working, tenacious and responsible, is highlighted. Hence, rural youth is now portrayed as self-disciplined, struggling against hardship, a firm willed paragon who inherits communist, socialist characteristics. Kong Xiaolong (picture 68) from the episode *Love Elsewhere* epitomises this identity. As one contributor, *bmylove_4sghx*, says, 'Xiaolong, I saw the spine in you that urban youth lacks...your morality represents Chinese characteristics perfectly.....rural youth is the most brave and tenacious' (HunanTV *TEP* Blog 2008). The spine, the tenaciousness, and the morality are interpreted as the strength of rural youth to resist the impact of too much material prosperity, to accept his preordained fate, and remember his roots. Another internet user, Yunshijian, even eulogises Xiaolong and his noble morality with an enthusiastic poem, praising Xiaolong as epitomising the spine of the 'Chinese nation',

Your fate is preordained to be full of suffering, but once you come out and see
the world, you would become the spine of 'Chinese nation'!

¹⁴⁴ It was also the same attitude applied by the ever poor socialist city in the Mao-era to deal with the western capitalist modern world. Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, city at present days, is like the bratty urban youth, is believed as having forgotten its roots, in need of being waken up by countryside, which is acting as the state's original culture.

In *Love in a Distant Mountain*, the rural youth Luo Xianwang (picture 69) refuses the urban school's offer of a financial support for him to stay and study in the city. He says, 'I don't want to accept too much economic support which could possibly result in my dependence.' The programme is surprised by Luo's independence, 'this is one we have never met before, very confident, resilient, self-reliant, this rural boy makes us confused', but also praises the fact that, 'the colorful urban life hasn't changed this stoical rural boy', he is still 'holding his love to his poor homeland, he doesn't lose his pure, beautiful soul in a prosperous city'(voiceover).

The consensus shows that rural youth are represented as moral paragons, the embodiment of communist, socialist characteristics. As a signifier, 'rural youth' has been sutured by the master signifier of socialism as well. Though the nature of the countryside does include moral fibre demonstrated by communal support, struggling against hardship, etc. However, seeing 'rural youth as moral paragons' is at least partially a structural misrecognition. Misrecognition, as Zizek says,

concerns the relation between a structured network and one of its elements: what is really a structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements, appears as an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also belongs to it outside its relation with other elements. (1989:19)

I argue, Gao Zhanxi is the symptom, the point of breakdown, breaking down the consensus of rural youth being moral paragons. This consensus is seen as the universal but actually is only the structural misrecognition. As a proof, rural audience D2 says during the interview, 'kids like Gao are not uncommon in my village, or other villages, his behaviour in the city is normal, the show was a bit exaggerated.' The recognition of the exaggeration implies the recognition of media's stigmatisation, whilst 'kids like Gao are not uncommon' suggests that 'Gao' breaks down the consensus.

Another example is the rural boy Wu Zonghong (picture 70). In the first episode of season five when *TEP* restarted in January 2012, he bears a resemblance to Gao Zhanxi. In this episode *Youth don't be Sad*, Wu Zonghong was asked by an editor, 'which father is better? this urban father or the father at home?' Wu said, 'this urban father, of course.' The editor then got confused and raised a similar question, 'does he abandon the old for the new? does he forget his roots?' However, the show immediately answered itself, 'it is because the love comes too strong, too sudden, it confuses him.' Wu Zonghong got lost because 'he loves too quickly and too strongly' (voiceover). At the end, the voiceover says with a sense of relief, 'the mountain of his hometown offers a forgiving embrace to this rural youth, rinses out his confusion. After a sober reflection, Wu has found a firm goal in his life.' Once again, returning to the rural mountain redeems the rural boy.

¹⁴⁵ Hunan TEP Blog (2008) 'Audiences' words'. [online] available from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd101008tc2.html [29 March 2008]

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Picture 67

The rural boy Shi Hongqiang carrying water.
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Picture 68

The rural boy Kong Xiaolong gathering firewood.
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Picture 69

The rural boy Luo Xianwang returns to his village.

Picture 70 The rural boy Wu Zonghong,

subtitle, 'he envies these urban youths so much.'

Who are We?

As discussed above, Gao Zhanxi is the symptom. The next question is, can we not only clarify the symptom but also 'identify with the symptom' (Zizek 1999:224)? One internet contributor comments as follows under a thought-provoking pseudonym *Old Gao Zhanxi*,

I am not a maudlin guy, but the show makes me cry several times.....it is a complex feeling, I was like this Gao Zhanxi when I was little. I went to an urban high school when I was 15 year old. When I first walked down a street in a city, I found a TV set displayed in the show window of a store, playing a programme, and free to watch! That was the time I swore to myself that I have to work hard to earn enough money, to buy a TV in the future, and watch it everyday! Therefore, I truly understand Gao, I understand why he cries.....And my son is just like another Wei Cheng, a sensitive, kind urban boy but lacks self-control.

(25 September 2006 in *Bingtangbulu* Blog)¹⁴⁶

This contributor not only makes clear his own identity---another Gao Zhanxi, but also makes his son an example--a boy born with an urban identity, with his father's rural background 'bleached' or washed away. It reveals the interlinked relation between firstly, urban dwellers and rural residents, secondly, the 'bratty' urban youth and the 'ignorant, decadent' rural youth.

¹⁴⁶ In the follow up the *Bingtangbulu*'s personal blog, see Appendix 2.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the presenter of the dating show /YAO, Meng Fei says, 'three generations ago, all of the Chinese were peasants!' The identity of urban dwellers actually has a long intricate history of hybridisation. The Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP) was from 1927 through 1937 and from 1945 to 1949. The CCP enacted sweeping Land Reform to win the support of the peasants and built the revolutionary bases of the Red Army in the rural areas to fight against the CNP who occupied the majority of the cities. The primary force and reinforcements of the Red Army were also coming from the peasantry. Soon after, the 1949 Chinese revolution opened city gates to returning refugees and job-hungry peasant ex-soldiers. The result, as Li explains, 'was an uncontrolled inundation of the cities: some 14million people arrived in just four years. Finally Maoism adopted a household registration system to tightly constrain urban population growth' (quoted in Davis 2006:53). Since then, these new urban dwellers and their subsequent generations become urban residents with a birthright to hold a superior social status supported by a series of political-economic policies and the household registration system. It differentiates city residents as first class and peasants as second class. Additionally, according to the Statistical Communiqué of Chinese Population 1953, the total population was 0.6 billion and the rural population was more than 0.5 billion. By 2010, the total population had reached 1.3 billion, with the urban population occupying 49.68%, and the rural population accounting for 50.32%. The numbers of cities in China also increased from 136 in 1949 to 193 in 1978, and to 657 in 2010.¹⁴⁷ This data suggests, among other things, that substantial numbers of rural residents have migrated to the cities. The peasants are latecomers, rather than outsiders, with their identity changing and hybridising since the day they enter a city.

Interestingly, the editor Liu Xuebo epitomises this hybridised identity as a representative of the new generation of migrant peasants, as he himself was a rural boy who moved into a city many years ago. As he writes, 'I was deeply touched when I saw Gao tearing in the BMW. At that moment, I suddenly thought of myself...Just like Gao, I was born in the countryside, and I had never seen a big city until I was 15 year old. When I see Gao, I see myself ten years ago' (HunanTV *TEP* Blog 2006)¹⁴⁸ After living in a city for many years, he, to some extent, has completed his transformation by urban culture, and gained a hybridised identity.¹⁴⁹

Additionally, in the in-depth interview, D2¹⁵⁰ recalled that when he visited Wuhu city for the

¹⁴⁷ The central people's government of PRC (2011) *Statistic Report of Social Service Development in 2010*. [online] available from <http://www.gov.cn/qzdt/2011-06/16/content_1885931.htm> [16 June 2011]

¹⁴⁸ HunanTV *TEP* Blog (2006) 'Editor's Diary----Liu Xuebo'. [online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ab38bd1010006j6.html> [11 October 2006]

¹⁴⁹ Liu shares similar thoughts with D4, ay1, ay2, and ay4. He blames Gao for indulging in the material prosperity and takes it as Gao's 'corruption', he feels released when Gao returns to his village. In his unconscious, he too tries to protect an image of rural youth being a traditional, purer, moral one.

¹⁵⁰ Male, 32 year-old, vocational high school, engineer. See Appendix 1.

first time, his dream was to be a salesclerk in a big shopping mall, 'to be a salesclerk would make me feel that I own all the commodities in the shopping mall. That would make me extremely happy.' Apparently, he was keen to accept the transformation of consumer culture and commodity fetishism. Rural youth is not an outsider, but only a latecomer, who arrives in the city much later than urban youth, to receive the transformation. Therefore, I argue, the 'ignorant' rural youth is the one who newly enters a city, and is just about to receive the transformation of consumer culture, while the 'bratty' urban youth has completed this transformation and indulged too much in material prosperity, and is thus, much more alienated.

In the in-depth interview (3 March 2011), urban audience C2, a principal of a middle school for the children of migrant peasant workers, also proves the hybridity of his students who come from the rural families,

The children in my school all come from the rural areas, but generally, I don't think that there is much difference between them and urban children. They play the same video games. I would like to play *TEP* to my students, from the perspective of treating them as urban children too, telling them not to get addicted to those computer games. All of these phenomena, such as skipping school, internet addiction, happens all the time in my school.

In a way, the 'bratty' urban youth, who was born with an urban identity, can be seen as an excessively 'decadent' rural youth, who has been damaged by hedonism and a dissipated lifestyle. The city being critical of Gao Zhanxi actually reflects the city's criticism on Wei Cheng and on the damaged city itself. When the city asks Gao not to forget his roots, it reflects the city's demand on itself and its people---not to forget its socialist identity and its communist, socialist 'roots'.

Therefore, we could say that we are all Gao Zhanxi, and that we bear a resemblance to a different extent, ranging from a sound one, such as Kong Xiaolong, on one end of a spectrum to a damaged one, such as Wei Cheng, at the other end of the spectrum. This is what Žižek says that we should not only clarify the symptom but also identify with the symptom. As he explains,

This procedure of identifying with the symptom is the exact and necessary obverse of the standard critico-ideological move of recognising a particular content behind some abstract universal notion, that is, of denouncing neutral universality as false ('the 'man' of human rights is actually the white male property-owner...'): one pathetically asserts (and identifies with) the point of inherent exception/exclusion, the 'abject', of the concrete positive order, as the only point of true universality. (1999:224)

It suggests that ideological criticism is not there to reveal the falseness of the universality, but to clarify and identify with the symptom, to make the particular, which is rejected by the

universality, becomes the universal. Further, for Žižek, there is no neutral universality,

Leftist universalism proper does not involve any kind of return to some neutral universal content (a common notion of humanity, etc); rather, it refers to a universal which comes to exist (which becomes 'for itself', to put it in Hegelian terms) only in a particular element which is structurally displaced, 'out of joint': within a given social Whole, it is precisely the element which is prevented from actualising its full particular identity that stands for its universal dimension.

(ibid)

In this case, Gao Zhanxi is the true universality, because he is the particular element, who is 'out of joint', and has no proper place within the hierarchy.

In the discussion follow up *Bingtanghulu's* blog, some contributors also comment that Gao's behaviour in the city is precisely universal. For example, as one contributor, *Xueshanfeixue*, puts it, 'Gao Zhanxi is a lived human, there is no human who doesn't like these things or this life standard, and his behaviour is normal, any normal kid would act like that.' Another user, *Guoke*, says, 'Gao Zhanxi is just an ordinary kid, he is not a God, I think there is no one who could resist the temptation. How could you ask him to resist it? Why couldn't we just treat him as an ordinary kid, without judging him so harshly?'

Indeed, in the show, Gao's goodness is revealed by the interview with his teacher and classmates. They say that he works hard in school, he is stoical, outgoing, responsible, but this was only casually mentioned by the show. Some examples of his good behaviour were also neglected. For example, when Wei's mother paid 149RMB to buy him a pair of new sneakers, he said, 'thank you very much, auntie. I am sorry (for letting you spend so much money on me).' As well, on the street, he gave money to the poor acrobat girl who was making a living by performing on street. Gao's behaviour, in general, actually just proves that he is changing, in the endless process of hybridising. Hybridity is universal. Therefore, Žižek states, 'criticism of the possible ideological functioning of the notion of hybridity should in no way advocate the return to substantial identities----the point is precisely to assert hybridity as the site of the Universal' (ibid:225). It suggests that our identity should be understood as being in an endless process of hybridising, and that the perfect urban youth, as an identity, is just a fantasy, an unreachable goal. Gao Zhanxi not only breaks down the universal of rural youth being moral paragons, but also destroys the possibility of a perfect urban youth.

In this case, constantly returning to the countryside is for fulfilling the desire of constantly hybridising. It is the countryside fantasy that constitutes our desire, 'provides a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure' (Žižek 1997:7). In the Chinese context, a hybridised youth is the embodiment of this 'positive object', because, he/she represents the sublime object, who is in the endless process of hybridising and who has not forgotten his roots. In the face of modernisation, rural youth

hold on neither to 'rejectionism', nor 'Kemalism' (i.e. full Westernisation) (Huntington 1996:72-5). Rural youth are capable of following 'reformism' because they hold on to a bit of socialist 'root', i.e. socialist nature, which makes them 'people of a special mould, who are made of special stuff' (Žižek 1989:162). This special stuff, in the Lacanian name, as Žižek recognises, is 'object petit a, the sublime object placed in the interspace between the two deaths....as if they are in a way 'the living dead', still alive but already excluded from the ordinary cycle of natural forces---as if, that is, they possess another body, the sublime body beyond their ordinary physical body' (ibid:162-63).

A hybridised youth, either comes from a city or a village, becomes the sublime object, not because he/she is a 'moral paragon', as represented in *TEP*, rather, it is because that he/she holds on to a bit of socialist nature which is the 'object petit a' in the Chinese context. 'Object petit a', as the object of fantasy, 'is that 'something in me more than myself' on account of which I perceive myself as 'worthy of the Other's desire' (Žižek 1997:8). So, all of the Chinese would like to perceive themselves as industrious decent people who hold on to a bit of socialist nature, even wearing name brands produced by us following the doctrine of the neoliberal market. As a proof, after staying in the village for seven days and becoming a hybridised youth, Wei Cheng finally wins enormous praise from audiences. The precondition for a rural youth participant to win audiences' heart is that he, not only is morally sound, but also works hard at school and has great grades.

The existence of the sublime object depends on the symbolic order. For example, the sublime characteristic of money is 'always sustained by the guarantee of some symbolic authority' (Žižek 1989:13), therefore, money is indestructible, exempted from the effects of wear and tear. The sublimity of the Monarch is supported by the state's political order, therefore, the Monarch 'is able to say 'l'Etat, c'est moi' (the state, it's me)...who embodies the State'(ibid:238). It seems that the Monarch possesses another sublime, mysterious body beyond his ordinary physical body. Likewise, the sublime of rural youth is guaranteed by the legitimacy of the state's socialist political regime and ideology. In the ruling party's ideology, rural youth, as the representative of rural China, are expected to inherit, hold on to firmly communist virtues as 'men of iron will' and not to forget their origins.

Finally, if we are all Gao Zhanxi, then, the representation of Gao in *IA* without doubt offends the majority of society. As it is not a personal turmoil anymore, the turmoil is universal. For example, a contributor, *Wuxin*, comments on the follow up blog, 'as a boy who also comes from a rural village, I have experienced and truly understood the turmoil induced by my humble origin and the vanity of a mercenary, materialistic society. I believe that Gao Zhanxi is undergoing the same as I had before.' It also explains the controversy and the condemnation of Hunan TV, as discussed in Chapter 4. The social anger indirectly proves the hybridity of urban dwellers' identity.

Therefore, Xie Kangsheng, the Deputy secretary of Hunan Province of CCP, instructed as follows, 'Hunan satellite TV should canvass and consider the various public opinions to

ensure the quality of the following episodes' (Critical Bulletin 2006).¹⁵¹ The end result is the representation of rural youth as moral paragons. This identity captures both urban and rural people's enjoyment. Additionally, for the central government, it is an alternative method of ideologically supporting the peasantry. Indeed, whether it has been rendered successful or otherwise, ideological support has been the government's solution to the increasing tensions arising from this unharmonious, urban-rural divided society. It proves what Hall stated when he said that the media is 'shaping the consensus while reflecting it, which orientates them within the field of force of the dominant social interests represented within the state' (1982:87).

Provincialism and Modernisation

So, the ethnic minority, rural youth are also required to step into the hybridisation to open up their horizons, step out of their cultural 'provincialism' and give up 'rejectionism' for modernisation. It suggests that China is trying to practice modernisation with a 'reformist' attitude.

In the show, many ethnic groups' villages are picked and enthusiastically presented as a scene of simple, tranquil, natural, idyllic landscapes, some as beautiful as the 'Peach Blossom Valley' (voiceover in episode *Closed Heart*) depicted in Tao Yuanming's (365-427, Eastern Jin Dynasty) pastoral poem. Obviously, it is an 'intensity of attention to natural beauty, but this is now the nature of observation, of the scientist or the tourist, rather than of the working countrymen' (Williams 1973:20). These ethnic rural villages include the most preserved Li ethnic group village of Hainan province, the last armed Miao ethnic group village of Guizhou province, the 600-year-old Buyi ethnic group village of Guizhou province, and Tujia ethnic group village of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture which is in Hunan province. The first episode of season five in January 2012 featured a Yi ethnic group village of Simao area in Yunnan province, which is famous for producing Pu'er tea (picture 71). The second episode picked a Zang ethnic group's autonomous county of Sichuan province, the village is surrounded by mountains, lakes, and grass land (picture 72). The unique folk customs, such as clothing, hairstyle, greeting etiquette, etc., are demonstrated as a rare find compared with the homogenised urban culture of the civilised world. It pleases the urban, Han ethnic majority audiences. Besides, the rapid-fire editing of heavy physical farming, accompanied with the pleasurable music and footages of smiling faces, makes it a joyful, easy job to handle and conveys the impression of a successful future harvest. The programme dilutes the hardship of rural life and represents the farmers as peacefully accepting their impoverished life. Pure happiness, industrious farmers, organic food and peaceful environment, all of these are in line with the pastoral poem tradition depicted by the urban culture meme and held by the urban people. The phrase 'Peach Blossom Valley' is used in several different episodes as a metonym for a utopian countryside. However, it cannot cover up the poverty of rural families. As urban youth Chen Junwei's parents said (*Mountain Call and Sea Shout*), 'I never thought that there would be some places this poor', 'it is much worse than what I've

¹⁵¹ CQVIP(2006) 'Xie Kangsheng comments on *TEP*'. [online] available from <<http://www.cqvip.com/Read/Read.aspx?id=22846542>> [12 September 2006]

imagined.' There is an extreme contrast between the poor village and the prosperous city. So, how to explain such rural poverty?

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Picture 71 '[this place] nurtures a long history of Pu'er tea culture.' (subtitle)

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Picture 72 '[the village] is surrounded by mountains and white clouds.' (subtitle)

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Picture 73

A Ji, in the airport, wearing Miao ethnic clothes.

Picture 74

A Ji raises his hands at the airport security check.

TEP firstly credited a harsh natural world, 'the conditions of a human environment' (Williams 1973:248), with the overwhelming poverty in these rural areas. It is said that the

harsh climate, lacking resources and barren land cannot offer a subsistence level of crop production. As the voiceover says, 'because of the lack of transport facilities and the infertile land, the beauty of Luohao village is juxtaposed with the pressure of poverty.' However, it is just a beautiful assumption that the grain harvest would definitely bring affluence. Even in an agrarian province with the most fertile land, the farmers still cannot gain fair, sufficient benefits from their agricultural production. The show also circumvents mentioning that the central government should apply pro-rural policy to improve their basic social infrastructure.

Most importantly, the show suggests that the cultural provincialism of the minority ethnic groups is the main reason for causing their poverty. The persistence of traditional customs and beliefs were narrated in the commentary and juxtaposed with the scene of poverty. For example, in the episode *Mountain Call and Sea Shout*, the voiceover says, 'for thousand years, Basha (Miao ethnic group) people have been living their traditional lives and holding on to their beliefs at the behest of their ancient ancestors, passing from generation to generation, forming a peculiar culturally-isolated 'island'.' It says that they are willing to live a primitive life, refusing to change because they would like to protect their traditional culture. The footage here is a poor cottage, worn chairs, broken beams and a little bonfire. The extreme poverty is presented as suggesting their persistence of the ethnic culture and the rejection of the outside modern world. Therefore, when A Ji (picture 73, 74) raised his hands at the airport security check, it was interpreted as this Basha boy is 'giving up their thousand years old, traditional culture and moving closer to modern civilisation' (voiceover). When A Ji refused to wear new style trousers, eat seafood and play badminton, it was interpreted as 'he was rejecting everything from the new world with a stubborn attitude...it is his self-protection gets in the way of acclimatising to city life'(voiceover). The show represents A Ji as a sensitive, frightened Miao ethnic boy who rejects the modern world. The whole Basha Miao ethnic group, as the voiceover states, 'are living in an isolated peach blossom valley (cloud-cuckoo-land), they have more fear to the outside world than fantasy.'

In the show, words such as 'defense', 'rejection', 'exclusion' set the binary opposition between the ethnic group's culture and modern culture. The Miao ethnic group's world is signified by the flaming bonfire, the dilapidated stilt-house, whilst the modern civilisation, as the voiceover says, is an 'unknown world' for them, displayed by the footage of soaring skyscrapers, shuttling cars and bustling neon lights. The narration of the show even tints the Miao ethnic group culture with a flavour of superstition, which is seen as the opposite to rational science. When A Ji is ready to set off for the city, a torrential rain suddenly starts, the voiceover then puts it, 'the Sky was smiling at the beginning, but it seems to have suddenly changed his face. A fierce gale blows and heavy rain follows, it makes A Ji frown, and his father silently smokes the pipe. Is the Sky implying that A Ji's journey is going to be unpredictable and uncertain?' It seems that the programme speaks on behalf of the Miao people, indulges in anthropomorphism and represents the uncontrollable natural phenomenon as the Sky God's mysterious warning. Combining with the Miao people's reaction such as frowning, silently smoking, it is suggesting that the Miao culture is

superstitious, backward, uncivilised and primitive which is opposite to the advanced, scientific, rational modern culture. Hence, the voiceover says, 'villagers see him off in the most solemn manner. Carrying all their worries, A Ji walks towards modern civilisation in the heavy rain.'

It needs to be noted that it is the historical, political, and economic reasons that are causing the minority ethnic groups to experience helplessness in accessing modern civilisation. They are somehow forgotten, rather than rejecting the outside world. However, the narration implies that the ethnic minority groups have an 'rejectionist' attitude towards modernisation. The cultural provincialism therefore is the obstacle to their stepping into modernisation. The show clearly repudiates the 'rejectionism', confirming again the necessity and inevitability of hybridity. The enjoyment of material prosperity and the transformation of consumer culture become an education, a fantastical edification of urban culture for the ethnic minority youths to accept hybridisation. As the voiceover says, 'after enjoying a bustling city and its prosperity, is the rustic A Ji able to step out of his own world and change his view of life?' Refusing to change then suggests the preservation of the old culture, as the crux of the argument of the show, 'A Ji should not be as stubborn as his father's generation'; rather, he should accept the education and brand new ideas, which are of 'sufficient strength to change his life'(voiceover).

Here, *TEP* offers the ethnic minority rural youths an imagined sense of a cosmopolitan reality in terms of cultural mixing and equity in city life. Timothy Brennan frames cosmopolitanism as a drive for 'ethical or aesthetic material for a unified polychromatic culture----a new singularity born of a blending and merging of local constituents' (2003:41). In the Chinese context, various minority ethnic traditions, as local constituents, are expected to be hybridised by the neoliberal urban culture. The minority ethnic rural youths are asked to, at least partially, uproot themselves from customary differences, regional particularities, to blend into modern culture, to accept the doctrine of the neoliberal market. Therefore, A Ji was taken to shop for modern clothes, and also asked to hand out insurance flyers on the street by his new urban father, who is the general manager of this insurance company (picture 75). Again, it reflects the ideas of the **Freiburg School** (Chapter 2), which advocates that individuals should be entrepreneurs.

Brennan argues, 'If cosmopolitanism springs from a comfortable culture of middle-class travelers, intellectuals and businessmen...(then) the realities of global interpenetration and homogenisation, mass migration and mass culture, under the dominance of capital----is an ideology of the domestically restricted, the recently relocated, the provisionally exiled and temporarily weak' (2003:42). In general, for all of the rural people, it is precisely the so-called 'temporary weakness' engendered by their social, political, economic positions that allows the concept of cosmopolitanism to thrive. Rural people move to a big city, 'as a temporary means to stay afloat as they strive for bigger things in career and in life' (Keith Wagner 2013:373). However, lacking in 'formal power and material resources' (Amy Hanser 2008:3), rural people, including the rural youth, no matter they are from Han group or ethnic minority group, mainly become workers, such as

factory workers, service workers, leisure workers, and construction workers, to serve those of a higher social class, i.e. the urban class. Most are not able to 'achieve the comfortable culture attributed to middleclassdom' (Wagner 2013:373). The end result is that they would become what Wagner calls 'factitious cosmopolitans' (ibid:372).

Further, in terms of culture mixing, the promise of cosmopolitanism implies that the ethnic culture would not be banished due to modernisation. The bigger context beneath it is that the Chinese government does not take Chinese modernisation as fully Westernisation. Therefore, Chinese culture and civilisation would not be banished, or fully Westernised, due to modernisation. As said in Chapter 1, Chinese isolationism as seen in the past had been brought to an end by Western militarism and expansionism, such as seen in the Opium Wars of 1839-1842. Besides, 'in a world becoming overwhelmingly modern and highly interconnected' (Huntington 1996:73), rejection is hardly possible. The Chinese government now intends to 'combine modernisation with the preservation of the central values, practices, and institutions of the society's indigeneous culture' (ibid:74). This attitude has dominated the society. As discussed in Chapter 3, Liu Huan, the judge of *The Voice of China* 2012, evaluates the Yi ethnic group contestant, Jike Junyi, 'the feeling of singing English songs is grafted on to the singing of Chinese folk songs.....This is really the way towards internationalisation. We are presenting our own music, using a way that is widespread and popular around the world.'

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Picture 75

A Ji handing out insurance flyers on the street.

Picture 76 The head of village asks Gao to 'bring

good experience back to our village.' (subtitle)

Modern Knowledge Changes Fate

For the Chinese government, their understanding of modernisation places extra emphasis on science, knowledge, and material civilisation. Therefore, the market is a strategy for economic development, and modern knowledge, as represented in *TEP*, is taken as a powerful tool to conquer poverty, and to change 'fate'. As the Tujia ethnic boy Kong Xiaolong's father said, 'why are the peasants so poor? Just because we didn't study, have no ability to earn money.' His uncle believes that going to a city is 'a good opportunity to learn something, you must go.' Likewise, the head of the village also asked Gao Zhanxi to 'learn what is happening there, and bring the good experience back to our village'(picture 76). The 'something', 'good experience' suggest the modern knowledge which is believed to bring the city the splendor, beauty and superiority. Modern knowledge is portrayed as the reason for the opposition between primitive and modern, the underdeveloped and the

developed, destitution and wealth, country and city. As the political, economic reason is absent, 'study can change the fate' (voiceover). The editor asks A Ji, 'what will you tell your rural classmates?' A Ji says, 'I will tell them to work hard in school, walk out of our mountain, live in a city. The city is beautiful.' Thus, for rural youth, the goal of experiencing urban life, as psychologist Zhang Yiyun states, is to 'broaden his horizons, strengthen his belief and confirm his goal that study is the only way out'. In other words, cultural capital becomes the reason for urban-rural divide, and offers a way to suture class antagonisms. Moreover, hybridisation would be generally about learning and using modern knowledge, which would not jeopardise the ethnic culture, or Chinese culture.

'Modern knowledge changes fate', it has become another widely acceptable common-sense assertion, to deal with the issue of urban-rural divide. While waiting at the airport, Gao Zhanxi was browsing one book, *What the Poor Lack?* At a bookstore in Changsha city, he also spent £5, which is a lot of money for him, to buy four books, *Poor--Poor--Rich*, *Turn Failure into Gold*, *Be a Sailor if You can't be a Captain*, and *Do What Suits You*. All these books are advocating self-responsibility, self-entrepreneurism, self-help and self-development which are the core of the neoliberal idea. The innocent Gao was eager to learn some skills and knowledges to change his 'preordained destiny' (voiceover). Study also becomes a legitimate way for rural youth to escape from the misery of poverty. It refers to being admitted to an urban university, which entitles rural youth to enter a city, work in a city after graduation, get urban residence registration, and live in the modern world.

Conclusion

Common sense, as Gramsci argued, 'is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself' (quoted in Hall and O'Shea 2013:9). The newly formed common-sense assertions are there for solving new problems posed by reality at different historical moments in different contexts. It appears at the level of consciousness and reason, but behind it, there is a social fantasy that captures enjoyment and desire at the level of the unconscious, and how it captures the urban and rural people's jouissance places extra emphasis on very different aspects.

Common sense also contains a critical element, the 'healthy nucleus' (Gramsci 1971), which refers to a 'good sense', 'a sense of unfairness and injustice about 'how the world works'' (Hall and O'Shea 2013:10). Hall and O'Shea believe that 'good sense provides a basis on which the left could develop a popular strategy for radical change' (ibid). They assert that 'the left and the Labour Party must take the struggle over common sense seriously' (ibid:22), to be a 'popular educator', grab each opportunity that each crisis provides, to shape an alternative consensus or 'popular philosophy'. However, their analysis mainly focuses at the level of consciousness. Without being aware how the unconscious, overlooked illusion, in a capitalist system, controls jouissance and desire, the affect of their effort would remain unpredictable.

Further, in the Chinese context, the healthy nucleus, i.e. the notion of 'fairness' and its role

in popular discourse, has been submerged by a cynicism, by the myth of 'development and transition'. As discussed in Chapter 5, the uncertainty and insecurity as a fertile ground triggers nostalgia. However, when nostalgia traces back to an imagined, organic, and communist China, it also reminds people of the material poverty of the past. The past, for China, is not the stable and safe agrarian society, but a people suffering from being underdeveloped and poor, just like the situation of these rural families in *TEP*. This past only exists to remind Chinese people nowadays of the importance of pursuing modernisation, and to approve the economic achievement by introducing the neoliberal market. In other words, nostalgia serves to re-identify the dream of modernisation due to this unbearable poverty of the past. It suggests an impasse, China has to bear as the inevitable result of the neoliberal market, yet still conform to the global, neoliberal direction in order to get rid of poverty and humiliation. The legitimacy of the neoliberal market is maintained as a rational behaviour, 'through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealised) master idea' (Lyotard 1992:29), i.e. a magnificent modernisation. Therefore, the painful side of nostalgia causes people to accept the market, the spreading neoliberal discourse, and compromise with the status quo. The nostalgia most likely deepens cynicism, even though the urban-rural divide, as the consequence, is part of the neoliberal market. The government believes, as long as we see ourselves simply as one of the 'Chinese nation', the urban-rural divide and rich-poor divide would be reduced to one common denominator, the fact that we are one of the 'Chinese nation'.¹⁵²

Fortunately, the nostalgia directly locates the countryside as an egalitarian, organic place. This gesture precisely implies the existence of the countryside fantasy, which guarantees the possibility of regulating the market. Traversing the countryside fantasy is important, saying 'we are all Gao Zhanxi', it helps to break down the binary opposition between urban and rural. Nevertheless, the existence of it is also vital, for confronting the market, for ensuring that the 'reformism' is not just empty speech.

¹⁵² The question should be answered in the future is: When is the day comes that China is economically running neck and neck with the USA, will the myth of 'development and transition' still function as it does now to rationalise all the imperfections, and conceal all the anxiety and antagonisms? Is that day going to be the date that 'fairness' in popular discourse can be utilised by the leftist to challenge neoliberal discourse in the Chinese context?

Conclusion

Following Hegelian dialectical thinking, 'a study of phenomena in the process of change is far more instructive and rewarding than a study of the static state' (R.S. Baghavan 1987:23). In this thesis, CRTV and its development provides evidence of the contradictions within post-Mao Chinese society. CRTV functions as a lens for me to understand Chinese society in its post-Mao era by applying western cultural theories. Dialectically, it helps me to understand western cultural theories through the study of CRTV in Chinese society.

As I stated in the Introduction to this thesis, this study aims to observe CRTV and its development under the regulation of SARFT, to reveal how the neoliberal market is both legitimised and resisted in socialist post-Mao China. I have used Gramsci's theory of hegemony and common sense and Zizek's theory, which is described by Laclau as 'an eminent example of what Barthes has called a 'writerly text' (1989:xii). I have found that the legitimisation is achieved through hegemonic struggle and the formation of common sense at the level of consciousness, yet, the true counteraction is credited to the countryside fantasy at the level of the unconscious. Meanwhile, this countryside fantasy suggests the persistent existence of the heritage of proletarian revolution and socialism. Through the study of CRTV, we see first, the operation of socialist ideology at the level of both consciousness and the unconscious in post-Mao China. Secondly, the contradiction between the neoliberal market and socialism manifests itself through the development of CRTV. This contradiction is a very sensitive issue in post-Mao China. In addition, the social consequences induced by the individual-centred market are revealed.

Additionally, whilst Western RTV focuses on shaping a 'good individual', who is self-dependent, sexually liberal, not family centred, CRTV is aiming at shaping a 'good citizen', who is more collective-oriented, sexually conservative and family centred. This difference between Chinese and Western RTV exists because the context is different. As Margaret Thatcher said, society does not exist, the individual does. In China, however, the harmony of society has always been highlighted by the government, as representing its commitment to be a collective-oriented socialist state, though the government is introducing the individual-centred market. Therefore, we see the 'strangely composite' (quoted in Hall and O'Shea 2013:9), contradictory common sense. For example, the common-sense assertion that the 'city makes life better' is to promote the practice of the competition-centred, market-driven urbanisation, but 'money can't buy you happiness' is trying to stop people from getting too competitive or greedy. In other words, the government calls for values of the state to be compatible with socialism, and its principles to be in line with neoliberalism.

However, if we only see the regulation of SARFT as the government's autocratic action, then we might risk overlooking the resistant strength in it. Changing the perspective, the regulation actually suggests the struggle of the socialist state. Yet, as discussed, the effect of the struggle at the level of consciousness, such as imposing socialist morality, remains doubtful. Fortunately, we have the countryside fantasy. Also, I argue, it is the reason that *TEP* still maintains its good ratings, even after three years. The show is practicing a belief, and this belief supports the countryside fantasy which constitutes our desire. This is the main reason for audience enjoyment of the show. On the surface, it seems that it is the dream of a perfect youth drawing the attention, but in fact, it is the countryside fantasy which captures our jouissance and desire. Herein, audience response is important and recognised. By probing what concretely happened amongst *TEP* audiences, I elaborate how the countryside fantasy appears as common sense and operates.

Contradiction Continues, So does Resistance

Last year, the third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee approved a decision on 'major issues concerning comprehensively deepening reforms' and highlighted ten points in the communiqué released on 12th November 2013.¹⁵³ According to the communiqué, 'China will deepen its economic reform to ensure that the market will play a 'decisive' role in allocating resources. Build an open and unified market with orderly competition' (English.people.cn 2013). It says that 'economic reform is key, and the core solution is a proper relationship between government and market, leaving the market to play the decisive role in allocation of resources and the government to play a better service' (ibid). This actually reflects the ideas of the **Austrian School** which emphasises the organising power of markets. It could be expected that the tension between the neoliberal market and socialism is going to be deepened in the Chinese context. The individual will be asked to take more responsibility, to believe in self-help and self-care. Also, this policy will deepen the invasion of the doctrine of the market into areas, such as healthcare and education, which proves, 'capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business' (Fisher 2009:16-7).

Doctor/patient, teacher/student, citizen/state, client/provider relationships all have specific and different social contents. However, if everything becomes a commodity and we simply becomes customers, then 'all the other relationships are reduced to one common denominator: the fact that we are consuming a product in a market which only has value because we pay for it' (Hall and O'Shea 2013:11). The end result is that the whole of society becomes a big market, all the specific relationships lose a healthy organic environment. In daily life, we see news about nurses and doctors who are beaten by their patients because the patients feel that they did not get proper treatment after paying such expensive treatment fees. It is another manifestation of social anxiety and anger. The marketisation of the medical system, together with the retreat of the state, should be

¹⁵³ English.people.cn (2013) *10 points highlighted in communiqué released after key CPC meeting*. [online] available from <<http://english.people.com.cn/90785/8458156.html>>[16 November 2013]

responsible for this deterioration of the relationship between medical practitioner and patient. If RTV such as *Children's Hospital* (BBC) was ever produced in the Chinese context, it would reveal this staggering anger/anxiety and the unpleasant reality of the medical system.

At this stage, just revealing or attempting to destroy the appearance of an apparent 'natural order' is not enough at all. The spontaneous, unconscious countryside fantasy and the practices of the materialised belief are crucial. Of course, other measures must be taken as well, such as the anti-corruption movement conducted by the Xi administration (Xi Jinping, the new Chairman of China). Additionally, on 29th July 2014, the ex-security chief, Zhou Yongkang was arrested for 'serious disciplinary violation' (BBC News 2014).¹⁵⁴ Zhou was a member of the top decision-making body, the Politburo Standing Committee. Bringing him down was not a simple onrush of the anti-corruption acts. It is the ruling party striking back at the oligarchy. By bringing down the oligarchy, it seeks to avoid China being trapped by what has been called Cronycapitalism. It is a class revolution inside the Communist party, a self-revolution conducted by the ruling party. Also, it demonstrates the people's subject position. Only when the people were freed from being exploited, controlled and frightened, would the reformist path be truly possible. Besides, according to the communiqué, 'the urban-rural dual structure is a major barrier preventing the integration of development...people living outside cities should equally participate in modernisation and share its fruits' (English.people.cn 2013). The achievement is that, on 20 July 2014, the government announced a plan for establishing an urban-rural unified residence registration system. Without a doubt, it will benefit the peasants.

Finally, in regard to egalitarian redistribution, Chairman Xi Jinping has stressed that the achievement of Open Reform should be equally shared by everyone, as he says, 'the Chinese dream is, after all, the people's dream.' The Chinese leftists have started their actions, and actively articulated the 'fairness'. For Žižek, 'the real act precedes the (particular-factual) activity; it consists in the previous restructuring of our symbolic universe into which our (factual, particular) act will be inscribed' (1989:245). However, the countryside fantasy precisely indicates the existence of a different symbolic universe in the Chinese context. In other words, China can skip the step of restructuring our symbolic universe. The particular-factual acts, the efficient intervention are precisely premised on the countryside fantasy, and they are going to change the status quo.

Omissions and Future Research

In this study, I have not got the scope to do comparative research, such as comparing *TEP* with *Amish in the City* and *Living with the Amish* (UK, Channel 4), which would offer the chance to observe the different ideological meanings of a similar format in different contexts. In addition, I have not found any western research on these two Christian-Amish-related RTV programmes. Besides, in October 2013, the Chinese version of a Korean RTV *Where are We Going, Dad?* (*WWGD*) was produced by the same

¹⁵⁴ BBC News China (2014) *Zhou Yongkang: China investigates ex-security chief*. [online] available from <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-28544428>>[29 July 2014]

production team as *TEP*, becoming a new hit. *WWGD* can also be seen as a variant of *TEP*, as it brings celebrities and their kids, who were 5-year-old on average, to the rural areas with harsh conditions. It would be interesting to see if *WWGD* indicates the countryside fantasy as well, if so, how the countryside fantasy captures enjoyment and desire of celebrity group.

Ideology, as Žižek says, is 'a dreamlike construction hindering us from seeing the real state of things, reality as such' (1989:48). For him, explaining the unconscious fantasy is for exposing the secret of the uncanny capitalist system. However, for this study, by revealing the countryside fantasy, it aims at understanding, amplifying and mobilising the 'strength from the depths of distant mountains' to resist the market in the Chinese context. At this stage, we need as many of the practical acts premised on this fantasy as possible. I would not say that we are doing this to achieve communism, but we are definitely doing this for the principle of 'fairness'. The countryside fantasy is functioning in the reality of 'doing' itself. Its operation can be seen as a Chinese version of *The Kilburn Manifesto*, only much stronger and much powerful!

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Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview

My interview focused on deliberately selected interviewees. There are three chosen categories for interviewing the audience: a) audience members who have moved to the city from the countryside; b) audience members who were born and raised in the city; c) audience members who have direct contact with the rural youth or are familiar with rural-related policy.

a) Focus group---snowball sampling

Four focus-group interviews are carried out in two cities, Wuhu in Anhui province and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, with two groups in each city, in total 19 people were involved. All the members are people who have moved to the city from the rural areas, to work or study in the city at the moment. Four video clips (10 minutes of each) from *TEP* are used as visual prompts.

Wuhu city: the group boxed in 20--35 year-old is coded as group A(Y:young), the group boxed in 36--50 year-old is coded as group B(M:middle age)

A(Y):

ay1: 22 year-old, female, sophomore university student

ay2: 21 year-old, female, sophomore university student

ay3: 33 year-old, female, accountant

ay4: 27 year-old, male, assistant engineer

ay5: 21 year-old, male, technician

ay6: 30 year-old, male, technician

B(M): catering, migrant peasant workers

bm1: 45 year-old, female, primary school education

bm2: 43 year-old, female, junior high school education

bm3: 41 year-old, female, primary school education

bm4: 41 year-old, female, junior high school education

bm5: 48 year-old, male, primary school education

Hangzhou city: the group boxed 20--35 year-old is coded as group C(Y:young), the group

boxed 36--50 year-old is coded as group D(M:middle age)

C(Y):

cy1: 29 year-old, male, Bachelor degree, IT

cy2: 21 year-old, female, sophomore university student

cy3: 27 year-old, female, Bachelor degree, teacher in junior high school

cy4: 27 year-old, female, Bachelor degree, saleswomen

D(M): sanitation workers, migrant peasant

dm1: 35 year-old, female, junior high school education

dm2: 50 year-old, female, primary school education

dm3: 45 year-old, female, junior high school education

dm4: 42 year-old, female, junior high school education

Each interviewee is represented in chapters with number such as, ay1(group A(Y), number 1), dm2 (group D(M) number 2). Information such as age, gender, occupation, education, how long has been living in the city or the rural area, etc., are recorded.

b) In-depth Interview

In total, I have selected and interviewed eight people by means of the personal one-to-one interview.

The interviewees who were born and raised in the city are coded as C1, C2, C3, C4.

C1: 29 year-old, male, Bachelor degree, engineer, the creator and manager of an online fan forum of *TEP*, Changsha city, Hunan province

C2: 39 year-old, male, university education, a principal of a middle school for migrant workers' children, Jiujiang city, Jiangxi province

C3: 27 year-old, female, British MA degree, company clerk, Shaoxing city, Zhejiang province

C4: 33 year-old, female, Bachelor degree, primary school teacher, Wuhu city, Anhui province

The interviewees who were born in the rural area and have moved to the city years ago are coded as D1, D2, D3, D4.

D1: 66 year-old, male, retired government official, Wuhu city, Anhui province

D2: 32 year-old, male, vocational high school (junior college), engineer, Wuhu city, Anhui province

D3: 23 year-old, female, Bachelor degree, software development, Anshun city, Guizhou province

D4: 22 year-old, female, university student, senior, Jiaxing city, Zhejiang university

Key questions:

1. How do you interpret the representation of the urban youth and their behavior in the rural area in *TEP*?
2. How do you interpret the representation of the rural youth and their behavior in the city in *TEP*?
3. To what extent, do you agree that *TEP* represents the Chinese social reality?
4. What other content would you like to see in the show?
5. How to assess *TEPs* educational value and its entertainment value?
6. How do you assess the traditional, moral value depicted in the show? Such as family love, people must never forget their origin; honor to those who uphold hard struggle, happiness consists in contentment, etc.

Appendix 2: The Personal Blog and its follow up Comments

[Online] available from <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_55c8d83b010005xg.html>

In the personal blog titled, *The Poor Gao Zhanxi, the Odious Hunan TV*, this 38-year-old male blogger condemns Hunan TV for losing the base line of morality by deliberately arranging the rural youth, specifically Gao Zhanxi, to experience urban material prosperity and recording emotional moments. He addresses Gao zhanxi as the rural youth, which reveals his own identity as one of the urban people, while the rural youth as the 'other'. He also criticizes Gao for becoming corrupted so quickly, within a couple of days, as being susceptible and weak. Based on his recognition of media power, manipulation and the programme's discourse, he concludes that the show creates a dream for Gao and deduces that it would create huge psychological turmoil for Gao, especially when Gao has to return to his rural family after the show has finished. Therefore, in order to avoiding the 'psychological turmoil', he states that the show should not bring Gao or any other rural youth to experience city life using the 'misleading' promise of 'it is good for rural youth'. This blog triggers an intensive online discussion follow up this blog, in regard to three aspects: a) media moral standards; b) if it is good to bring the rural youth to experience the city life; c) Gao Zhanxi as the representative of the rural youth.

The blog puts it as follows:

This is an entirely stage managed arrangement; a deliberate inducement for Gao Zhanxi... If you bring him to a museum, a library or a school, how would he feel about the city? However, you don't let him to go to a school, rather, you arrange a luxury car to pick him up at the airport (which is arranged in advance by the TV Station and Wei Cheng's father), you bring him to enjoy city life, teach him how to use the internet, we all know that people get addicted when they start using the internet. You (as a TV station) just want to watch him get addicted. A rural youth enjoys flying, BMW, the sumptuous meal, the Internet and a lot of pocket money in such a short period of time. How could he resist the temptation of the world of sensual pleasures? The commercialised Hunan TV just wants to watch him become corrupt and change his nature, watch him suffer from urban audience's prejudice and creating deception for the tears of the audience. Hunan satellite TV deliberately exploits raw emotion and sensationalism, humanity is traded for commercial interest. It is a cruel plan; can you arbitrarily bully the poor for your own commercial benefit? As for Wei cheng, I didn't talk about him that much, there is not that much to say, he exemplifies the urban youth, and his behaviour just proved that his nature is Good.

Gao Zhanxi has had his own fate, whether he is going to be somebody by studying hard with determined efforts, or to be a lifetime farmer just like his generations ancestors, that is his own fate. Gao, a very disappointing child, he changes more quickly than I expected, far too quickly....maybe Gao would really

work hard, fight the next few years, then enroll successfully at a university, get a job with good pay, to finally become a urban person and enjoy life, but I think that is really unlikely! More likely, he is going to fail and deteriorate; end up as a bad boy.

Comments on the follow up blog:

Zhenyanxia: I hate Hunan TV, why don't you bring Gao to an ordinary urban family? the laid-off worker's family? Because that would not attract any audience. Do you ever think about how this huge gap between urban versus country life would affect this rural youth mentally?

Jianghu: It is all about ratings!

Patengdeyao: I cry, I feel unhappy to see Gao in a completely daze at the airport. How could a rural youth know how to walk out of the airport and find the people who have come to pick him up, but whom he never met before?

Luguo: I cry for Gao, for the dream that people have deliberately constructed for him, in here (city), what is he? Who is he? We shouldn't be such a cruel spectator, even we cry and show sympathy.

Shenwutongjue: the most appalling thing is when the salesman came over when Gao was alone in his new urban family's home. He asked Gao what his surname was, and Gao said that it was Wei. Then, the subtitle deliberately highlighted this, implying that Gao had forgotten his surname. That was so mean, he is just an innocent boy, do you have to do this?

Butterfly: From the beginning, I think that it was a good show. It is really good to offer the rural youth such an opportunity. But gradually, I begin to feel that it is not about educating people; it is the mocking of the credulous, simple minded rural child! It makes the audience to believe that Gao easily immersed himself into urban hedonism, whilst the urban youth was moved to tears by the rural father. Wei seems a very sensible boy now,... do you have to use the rural youth as reference point, a guinea pig to educate the urban Internet addicted youth?

Kaixiaoling: Hunan TV should put an end to this kind of programme, which is lacking in morality. It is better to stop now; it will not last much longer anyway.

Wuming: This show is pleasing the rich by mocking the disadvantaged group; it reveals a gap in reality by creating the illusion of owning. It is a form of voyeurism....Hunan TV has lost the moral base line and the dignity of the media; it turns in to a villain, who bullies the kids on street to please their master.

Huahua: I would like to say something to those above who take this show as a (de facto) documentary programme. In fact, what you see in this show maybe not be the case in reality; don't even call it a documentary. All the shows are, to some extent, directed and commercialised by the television station. Once it makes you cry and keep watching, the TV station can then get more advertising revenue. ...I just hope the TV station can also consider their social responsibility towards society, for their audience, when they do this commercialising operation. If it gives correct guidance, educational meaning, and takes responsibility for its impact on society, then it could be a good show even if it makes you cry. If its only aim is commercialisation, causing irreversible damage to the inexperienced child, then it must have lost its morality and conscience.

Shian: I disagree. Whatever they do, firstly, we expect that the show has social influence; secondly, we expect that the show can wake up public conscience. Hunan TV chooses a novel theme, it is the focal issue of society, very close to our daily lives,...theme, presenter, the scene set, they all seem novel. I support Hunan TV for their innovation.

Suiyi: Nowadays, this society has no base line for propriety: righteousness, integrity and shame. ...The shameless, mercenary, ignorance and vulgarity of the media have been represented as diversity of ideas.

Meizi: I think this program is very novel, there is nothing bad. Gao broadens his horizons and realises that he could achieve this good life as long as he studies hard...with the help of more kindhearted people, I think he will get the future he wants.

Tantao: if I was Gao, I would be glad to be given this chance by Hunan TV; to get to know the world outside the mountains. There is nothing bad. If I was Gao, I wish I could have understood the world earlier. I am just an ordinary viewer, I want to see this kind of excellent programme.

Woshidangyuan: How come there are so many people that support this ignorant, very harsh blogger? He says that our people are too stupid, too naïve. When they see the world, they will get lost and fall down, so we have to look after our people, implement the obscurantism, not allow them to understand the world. When they face the world, we have to teach them how to think, not giving them the opportunity and ability to think independently. This is the sense of superiority. The urban people gossip here and project their worries on others, please don't put your fingers on rural youth with this sense of superiority.

Huhuran: So the blogger wants to keep Gao in his own ignorance and remain uncivilised? It is obviously better to let him see the world outside. Without ambition how could one fight and work hard? You think that Gao would become corrupt after seven days? Let's assume that he comes to the city when he reaches adulthood, sees the growing urban-rural divide, feels a sense of loss but having no ability to change, that is the day he is going to become corrupt. Now he is able to change it! That is the purpose of Hunan TV! Think of the 1980s,

when we heard from old classmates who came back from overseas with news that every foreign family has AC, a telephone, etc. How envious we were! That gave us a goal. Now, our country has become the biggest market by volume of sales in the world for telephones and AC! You only progress when you have a goal.

Wuming: I am wondering, how much would seven days experience impact on their behaviour and habits in the future? Would seven days experience really be able to change these urban youth and the way they have been living for the past dozen years?

Old Gao Zhanxi: I am not a maudlin guy, but the show makes me cry several times...it is a complex feeling, I was like this Gao Zhanxi when I was little. I went to an urban high school when I was 15 years old. When I first walked down the street, I found a TV set displayed in the window of a store, playing the programme, and free to watch! That was the time I swore that I have to work hard to buy a TV in the future when I have the money, and watch it every day! Therefore, I truly understand Gao Zhanxi; I understand why he cries... And my son is just like another Wei Cheng, a sensitive, kind urban boy but lack of self-control... According to Gao's performance on the last day, he is still a kindhearted boy. This kind of boy won't turn bad easily wherever he goes.

Appendix 3: Popular CRTV in China

1. Hunan satellite TV: <http://www.hunantv.com>
I am a Singer 我是歌手 (2013-) (singers competition show, Chinese version of Korean *I am a Singer*, MBC)
Let's Go on a Date 我们约会吧 (2010-) (Chinese version of *Take Me Out*)
The Exchange Programme 变形计 (2006-2008, 2012-) (social experiment show)
Where are We Going, Dad? 爸爸去哪儿? (2013-) (life experiment show, Chinese version of Korean *Where are We Going, Dad?*)
2. Zhejiang satellite TV: <http://www.zjstv.com>
The Voice of China 中国好声音 (2012-) (talent show)
Running Man 跑男 (2014-) (celebrity game show, Chinese version of Korean *Running Man*, SBS)
Chinese Dream Show 中国梦想秀 (2011-) (Chinese version of *Tonight's the Night*, BBC)
3. Shanghai Dragon satellite TV: <http://www.dragontv.cn>
China's got Talent 中国达人秀 (2010-) (talent show)
Chinese Idol 中国梦之声 (2013-) (talent show)
One Out of 100 百里挑一 (2010--) (Chinese version of *Take Me Out*)
Happy Rubik 幸福魔方 (2010-2011) (talk show, Chinese version of *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, ITV)
Dreamy Makeover Home 梦想改造家 (2014-) (makeover show, Chinese version of *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*)
4. Jiangsu satellite TV: <http://www.jstv.com>
If You are the One 非诚勿扰 (2010-) (Chinese version of *Take Me Out*)
The Brain 最强大脑 (2014-) (Chinese version of *Super Brain*, Germany)
Raid the Cage 芝麻开门 (2013-) (quiz and game show, Chinese version of *Raid the Cage*, Sony)
5. Guangdong satellite TV: <http://www.gdte.com>
Road to Star 中国好男儿 (2014-) (talent show)
6. Shandong satellite TV: <http://www.sdtv.com.cn>
I am Big Star 我是大明星 (2010-) (talent show)
Happily Go Ahead! 快乐向前冲 (2010-) (individual tackling obstacles show)
Star Wars 星球大战 (2014) (billiards stars-involved game show)